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"Hips Don't Lie:" Mexican American Female Students' Identity Construction at The University of Texas at Austin

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“Hips Don’t Lie:” Mexican American Female Students’ Identity Construction at The University of Texas at Austin

by

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Dedication

To my research participants, pseudo-named Angie, Blanca, Fabiola, Jessica, Natalia and Mary. You are the true holders of knowledge. Also to the young women in *INSPIRE: Empowering Texas Women Leaders*, who have inspired me to dedicate my work to making sure the university experience is the best it can be for all students.

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Abstract

"Hips Don't Lie:" Mexican American Female Students' Identity Construction at The University of Texas at Austin

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While a university education is sold to students as something anyone can achieve, their particular social location influences who enters this space. Mexican American women, by virtue of their intersecting identities as racialized women in the US, have to adopt a particular identity if they are to succeed through the educational pipeline and into college. In this thesis, I explore the mechanics behind the construction of this identity at The University of Texas at Austin. To understand how this happens, I read the experiences of six Mexican American, female students through a Chicana feminist lens, particularly Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness*. I discovered that if Mexicana/Chicana students are to "make it," they have to adopt a "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity. In other words, to be considered good students, Mexican American women must also adopt a code of conduct that is acceptable to the white-centric and middle-class norms that dominate education, both at a K-12 level and at the university level. This behavior is uniquely tied to the social construction of Mexican American women as a threat to the United States because of their alleged hypersexuality and hyperfertility.

Their ability to reproduce, biologically and culturally, means that young Mexican women must be able to show to white epistemic authorities that they have their sexuality and gender performance "under control." However, even if they adopt this identity, their presence at the university is policed and regulated. As brown women, they are trespassers of a space that has historically been constructed as white and male. This results in students and faculty engaging in microaggressions that serve to Other the Mexican American women and erect new symbolic boundaries that maintain a racial and gender hierarchy in the university. While the students do not just accept these rules, adopting the identity of "good student, nice Mexican woman" limits how the students can defend themselves from microaggressions or challenge the racial and gender structure. Nevertheless, throughout this thesis I demonstrate that even within the constraints of the limited identity available to the students, they still resist dominant discourses and exercise agency to change their social situation.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Introduction

SETTING THE STAGE

One evening in the Spring 2011 semester, I was facilitating a meeting of a leadership program for undergraduate women at the University of Texas at Austin. As a young Latina student complained about her brown and curvaceous body in what she perceived to be an institution dominated by white femininity, her friend tried to make her feel better by telling her: "Don't worry, your hips don't lie!" My student responded positively and they shared laughs and dance moves, as she owned her body and by extension her sexuality. Here, two Mexican American women invoked an essentializing image of Latina femininity that they learned from a Colombiana artist (who had to go blonde in order to go mainstream), and used her popular song and music video as a way to subvert white femininity as a normalizing force. Even though they reproduced the essentializing image of the wide-hipped Latina body, a reductive image was taken up in a very agentic way to validate a young woman's experience in college. She reconfigured her identity in relation to Latinidad (the expectation of what a Latina should be) and the "normative" white bodies in college by which all women are judged. Thus, the women were able to transform their social situation by reorganizing the racial meanings behind ideal beauty standards using a "Latina" cultural product as a point of reference.

As spaces usually populated by a majority of white students, faculty, and staff, college campuses can create an environment where the brown bodies of Latinas are decentered and disenfranchised (Bernal et al., 2006; Puwar, 2004). This means that, as trespassers of a previously all-white and male space (Puwar, 2004), Latinas' efforts of self-defining identities (whether personal or cultural) can be undermined by white and middle-class sociocultural values and standards (Mills, 1997). Moreover, they may experience pressure or guilt from family and friends if they decide to change their identity to fit in better at UT, forcing the students to shape-shift and embody various identities at once (Anzaldúa, 1987). Therefore, the promise that many students are given about how they can be anything they want when going to college is at best an ambivalent

expectation limited by the social construction of Mexican American women as hypersexual and hyperfertile in contrast to white women's normative sexuality.

Nevertheless, this ambivalence around identity construction can also give them an opportunity to resist dominant discourses and even change the university space into something that works for them. The negotiations Mexican American women have to make to survive college motivated me to write my thesis: *"Hips Don't Lie:" Mexican American Female Students' Identity Construction at The University of Texas at Austin.* My goal was to answer the following research questions: As Mexican women transition from their home communities to the university, how are they negotiating the new spaces and new structures? What discourses and ideologies are picked up and dropped as they construct new identities in college? How are they practicing agency in ways that not only respond to their social positioning within the mainstream culture at UT, but also impact and potentially change the social structures and context in which they live in?

Throughout my study, I discovered that my research participants' particular social location as both Mexican *and* women made a big impact on their identity construction at UT Austin and along the entire educational pipeline. In order to satisfy competing expectations of them and take advantage of the resources available to them, they felt compelled to adopt an identity of "good Mexican woman" that led to an image of "good student." This identity was contingent on overcoming stigmas that mainstream (that is, white and middle class) American culture assigns to Mexican female bodies, particularly over their sexuality and gender. Over the next few sections, I set up the stage for the rest of my thesis where I will discuss this in more detail. First, I will cover the site I chose to study and the language I am using. I will then cover my theoretical framework, followed by my methods. Finally, I will provide context and relevancy of my work through a review of the literature surrounding Mexican American women, education, and identity formation.

Site and participants

The site I chose is The University of Texas at Austin (also called UT and UT Austin), since it is the campus I attend. I also work in UT Austin with undergraduate students, all of whom are female. My familiarity with the campus and the dominating discourses circulating in it make it an accessible place to conduct research. Moreover, I have worked with various undergraduate women for three years at UT Austin, giving this project a personal aspect. I care about what various students experience in college, which is usually sold to them as "the ticket" for a better life. I am especially concerned about the fact that college is a place where students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds come into close contact for the first time because of K-12 segregated education in Texas (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Niu, Sullivan, & Tienda, 2008; Tienda & Niu, 2006).

There is a history of sexism and racism in all US college campuses (Goldstone, 2006; Sanday, 2006). Dwonna Goldstone writes that Americans in general, and UT in particular, have never really "embraced racial equality, as is evidenced by the fact that racial integration was and remains limited" (Goldstone, 2012, p. ix) on the UT campus. When it comes to gender oppression in US campuses, the best example is Peggy Sanday's *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus* (2006). She describes that there is a legacy of male privilege in academic institutions, where "old-boy feelings of solidarity by college administrators operate to protect male students from the consequence of their misconduct at the expense of their female victims" (Sanday, 2006, p. 31). She also writes that "women students, in many cases, are silenced and intimidated by sexism as well as by the usual feelings of anxiety and insecurity many students feel in the college setting" (Sanday, 2006, p. 191). After witnessing how my own students struggled with white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in our own college, it was not hard to decide to conduct my study here.

My participants are six women who identify as either Mexican American or Mexican. One of them identifies as Indigena from Mexico, but for privacy concerns I do not specify which nation she belongs to. All except for one of them are current students,

and they are all between the ages of 21 and 22. They are: (1) Angie, an Indigenous and Mexican American woman whose parents immigrated from Mexico but currently live in Houston; (2) Blanca, a Mexican American woman from Edinburg, a border town in South Texas, who has family on both sides of the border; (3) Fabiola, a Mexican American woman whose family has, for the most part, lived in the United States for various generations, with her parents currently living in San Antonio; (4) Jessica, a Mexican American woman from El Paso (a border city across from Juarez, Mexico) whose parents are both immigrants; (5) Mary, a Mexican American woman from Eagle Pass (a border town) whose parents are also immigrants; and (6) Natalia, a Mexican American woman whose family has lived in the United States for some time and currently live in San Antonio. Throughout this thesis, I interchange the terms Mexican, Mexican American, Mexicana and Chicana, the latter being a politicized term that also recognizes a history of living in the United States for a longer period of time, as a way of recognizing the different identities that the students have. I also use the term Chicana as a way to connect to my theoretical framework, which is informed by Chicana feminism, particularly Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness*. The only time I identify someone as Indigenous or Indigena is when referring to Angie.

Terms and Language

To keep in mind the ideologies of power and domination in U.S. society that permeate UT Austin, I use the terms white supremacy as described by bell hooks (1989) and heteropatriarchy as described by Andrea Smith (2006). I acknowledge that these are ideologies that have shaped U.S. society and affect the students in my research, since universities and educational institutions in general are "constituted by social relations of power" (Hyams, 2000, p. 635).

As Charles Mills writes, "White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today" (Mills, 1999, p. 1). bell hooks notes that it is an integral part of the educational pipeline:

> Teachers are often among that group most reluctant to acknowledge the extent to which white-supremacist thinking informs every aspect of our culture including

> the way we learn, the content of what we learn, and the manner in which we are taught. (hooks, 2003a, p. 25)

For hooks, using the term "white supremacy" has been more helpful than "racism" (hooks, 1989). It was a term she found useful when interacting with white feminists during the 1970s and 1980s in the U.S., as the women did not commit overtly racist acts against women of color, yet they still felt compelled to control their bodies. She also found it useful when relating to white English professors who wanted to add diversity to their staff, yet wanted her to think and feel just like them. She sees it as an ideology that overlays how white people interact with people of color, characterized by moving away from overtly racist acts yet still maintaining an attitude of superiority and control. Moreover, it is a term that best describes how people of color can also be complicit in reproducing a behavior and an ideology that upholds a racial hierarchy without the use of force. Therefore, throughout my thesis I use the term white supremacy to understand both the attitudes and ideologies that all the students encounter and even adopt, which can reinforce a racial hierarchy that affects them or their families.

In terms of male supremacy, Andrea Smith writes that, from the time of the European conquest of America to the present, certain bodies have had to be labeled as "inherently rapable" (A. Smith, 2005) in order to maintain racial and patriarchal order. In her discussion, she explains that control over women of color is maintained by morally judging how they perform their femininity and sexuality. Smith argues that judging women of color against a heteronormative image of the nuclear family (imagined in a capitalistic society) and white sexuality/femininity sets them up for failure, ensuring their domination as racialized women (A. Smith, 2006). She refers to gender domination as heteropatriarchy, as its main purpose is to make heterosexual relationships and (white) femininity seem natural ways of organizing society along a binary system of power, with (heterosexual) males having power over females. Seeming "natural" makes sexism invisible and harder to discuss in education, a trend that was very visible in my research participants.

This silence is in part attributed to common educational discourses surrounding gender that start in Pre-K and are perpetuated in college (Bennett deMarrais, 2000; Garrahy, 2003; Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). For decades, educators have constantly engaged in a rhetoric where they claim they do not see gender or that they treat male and female students equally (Bennett deMarrais, 2000; Garrahy, 2003; Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). Gender is so naturalized that educators never see how they reproduce heteropatriarchy at the expense of female students. Something that I was not expecting was the disturbing finding that, when my participants did point out gender, it was only to look down on Mexican culture as patriarchal, with virtually no critique of gender oppression in their "white" university world (except when asked about specific situations). This highlights the importance of looking at the intersection of race and gender in university spaces.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Identity, figured worlds and the *mestiza consciousness*

> [Especially if you are a] Hispanic female, no matter your background or anything, we all have the same opportunity when we arrive on this campus. It's a matter of courage, and being able to go out there and chase after what you want. Cause in the end it's only yourself that's holding you back from it. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

> I feel like the playing field for minorities, it's not leveled. So, in order to get to the university, it's a lot more difficult. And usually you find yourself being a first generation person coming to—to college, so, everything is new. And even if your parents wanna help, help you, they can't. They don't have the resources. So they don't have the knowledge. So I feel like that in itself, it's different from the mainstream. (Mary, Social Work)

These were very contradictory messages I would often hear from all six participants in my study. One second they would tell me race or gender had no effect in their lives, only to in the same breath provide examples of pretty overt (but mostly covert) sexism, racism and classism in their educational careers. On top of this, they all shared with me that no one had ever asked them the questions I asked regarding their

experiences at UT, their transition to college, their identities as Mexicanas, Chicanas, Mexican Americans or Indigenas, or the relationships and resources they found at UT and in Austin. Like the statements above, the students showed a very complex, often contradictory understanding of who they are as young, Mexican women at The University of Texas and in Austin at large. This understanding was composed of a combination of discourses that the women picked up from their families, their hometowns, from around Austin, from peers and professors at UT, and from their own particular *experiences* as brown women in a white, heteropatriarchal, capitalistic world (Cruz, 2001; Moya, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). In other words, there were various voices orchestrating their answers to my questions, some louder than others, which were articulated often in half-finished thoughts, with many hesitations, and with no lack of emotion (including laughter, groans and tears). Two main aspects of my theoretical framework allowed me to begin to unravel the web of their complex, contradictory and sometimes liberating stories. These were the concepts of identity, agency and figured worlds from Holland et. al's work (2001), and Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1987).

In *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner, & Cain, 2001), the authors write that "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves," and these "self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 3). For them, identity is a continuous process where people are in dialogical relationships with the different discourses, people and cultural artifacts in the different worlds they enter. Inspired by Bakhtin, Vygotsky and Bourdieu, the authors propose a framework where culture and identity are not static, but rather processes within which people are constantly "authoring" their identities. Applying it to my work, it helps me see that the students' experiences and choices are thought out, agentic situations. For Holland et. al, we are "individually and collectively […] not just products of our culture, not just respondents to our situation, but also and critically appropriators of cultural artifacts that we and others produce" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 17).

Some useful concepts from Holland et. al's work include *figured worlds* and *heteroglossia*. "Figured worlds" are "socially produced, culturally constructed activities" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 40). These are the imagined worlds that people produce through interacting with each other, abiding by particular rules (such as gender roles), and where bodies are organized based on positionality (for example, a Mexican American woman has a different position than a white woman because of racial and class power differences). Moreover, people in these figured worlds assign different meanings to symbols and artifacts, which become resources. Examples of figured worlds discussed by the authors include academia, where books are assigned great meaning, and writing them can even come at the expense of losing social connections. These figured worlds can become playgrounds of possibility, as people can challenge the rules as they enter and leave the different worlds. For example, as the students I interviewed entered college, they abided by some of the rules that position them differently from white and male students, yet they also took in the resources they could to enact subtle but real change.

Another concept that helps me understand the students I interviewed is "heteroglossia." Holland et. al understand that people "author" their identities not in a singular voice, but in a multiplicity of voices simultaneously. These voices include not only the "building blocks" such as language and symbols, but also the discourses and ideologies that arise from others' and their own experiences. In the case of my participants, when asked how they came to college for example, their answer contained the voices and expectations of their parents, their school councilor, peers from high school, peers from the university, university professors, dominant ideologies like meritocracy, and buried in between all of that the voice of their own experience as Mexican women. In other words, they orchestrated their voices to make sense of their experiences, their choices, and ultimately their identities. These identities were also constructed differently depending on how they experienced power (or the lack of it) in different figured worlds, producing different results when asked about different situations they were in. For example, if asked whether they thought professors or peers at UT treated them differently for being women, they would all adopt a liberal stance and say

they didn't believe gender affected theirs or anyone's education because UT is "so liberal." However, when asked about a specific situation where they experienced conflict, they could give me emotionally charged and well constructed answers where someone took advantage of their white, male or class privilege and used it against them.

The concepts of "figured worlds" and "heteroglossia" help me understand how the students in my project are subjects who take in the discourses and all the resources available to them, (re)work them to construct their ever-changing identities, and put the discourses back out there, affecting both the space and the people in it. This turns various university spaces into something different – something that works for them. This is where agency can be identified, because, as Holland et. al argue, people are in a constant state of being "addressed" and thus in the process of "answering" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 169). As the students navigate different worlds, they are constantly addressed by other students, professors, and their parents. This gives them an opportunity to answer back through words, actions and more. They choose from the myriad of discourses they picked up from others, as well as the ones they developed from their own experiences, and this gives them an opportunity to be creative, improvise, and continue their lives from that point of departure.

At this point, the concept of *la conciencia de la mestiza* becomes useful because their identities and experiences are contingent on their particular social location as young, Mexican American, Chicana and Indigena women. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) explains that the more one embodies social categories that make it difficult to fit into absolutist ideas of race, gender and sexuality, the more one problematizes social categories, resulting in a "messy" existence. She argues that Chicanas live in "a constant state of perpetual transition" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). She attributes this to the constant "clash of voices" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78) in the mestiza consciousness, which can result in ambivalence, "insecurity and indecisiveness" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). The voices can come from parents asking their daughters to fulfill their gender duties, from school officials asking them to control their "wild" and "exotic" sexuality, and even from peers that do not believe Chicanas should even be in college or in the country. All of these voices can

clash inside of each Chicana student, pushing her to be "in a constant state of nepantlism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). Still, this perpetual state of transition is the reality that the students must thrive in. Anzaldúa continues, "the new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79) (emphasis original). To make sense of this ambiguity, she cannot "hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). In fact, she must remain flexible and "stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). Only then can she cross the borders between her and the different worlds she must inhabit and move forward with her life. This demands breaking from Western understandings and logics, such as dualisms, and thus applying a theory developed in the margins and outside Western, patriarchal epistemology is the most appropriate lens under which to see the Mexican American women's experiences.

This is not the first time this lens has been used in education. Dolores Delgado Bernal defines "the concept of a mestiza consciousness as the way a student balances, negotiates, and draws from her biculturalism, bilingualism, commitment to communities, and spiritualities in relationship to her education" (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 623). While it is a consciousness that allows them to "speak back" to the social structures in a multiplicity of voices, she has also observed that "their silence and emotion point to the sexist, racist, and classist microaggressions" (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 623) teachers and peers push on them to discipline them. Therefore, I'm not only looking for voices but also times of silence.

Regulating the brown body into privileged spaces

Another aspect of Chicana feminism that will help me is the concept of "embodiment" and theorizing from the body. As Cindy Cruz states, "the brown body must be made central in any consideration of an epistemology of women of color" (Cruz, 2001, p. 658). Chicana feminism is theorized from experiences of the body. This means that I cannot see my participants' experiences as a disembodied reality (a tradition in

Western academia), but rather a reality rooted in the way people react to bodies that are read as racialized, gendered, and otherwise Othered.

As Cruz explains, "nothing provokes the custodians of normality and objectivity more than the excessiveness of a body" (Cruz, 2001, p. 659). In my study, I have been attentive to the ways that my participants talk about their body and how they and other people react to it, assign it meaning, and attempt to regulate its mobility in the university spaces. As Cruz states, "understanding the brown body and the regulation of its movements is fundamental in the reclamation of narrative and the development of radical projects of transformation and liberation" (Cruz, 2001, p. 657). Identifying the forces the students bump against when traversing college helped me see some of the particularities of Mexican American women's identities. Moreover, I saw how young Chicana college students that are in tune with their bodies can feel validated in their experiences with racism and sexism when the media, their friends, their families, and discourses coming from other sources acknowledge their differences. Thus, one advantage to being attentive to the body as a site of knowledge is the potential for the students to escape oppressive discourses that aim to fix them into static identities. As Cruz explains:

> Reclamation, for the Chicana social agent, is not only a strategy to make visible Chicana voices and histories, but is also the struggle to develop a critical practice that can propel the brown body from a neocolonial past and into the embodiments of radical subjectivities. (Cruz, 2001, p. 658)

Mexican American, female, undergraduate students at UT Austin are forced to negotiate their social position as racialized and female students in relation to white students, faculty and staff. Because college may also be the first time Latinas have intimate relationships with white colleagues, professors, boyfriends and girlfriends, they have to develop tools to negotiate racial micro-aggressions (Yosso et al., 2009). Examples of microaggressions include the eroticizing of their bodies, having a deficit view of their culture, as well as excluding them from social circles based on racial and gender difference. It is also important to remember that, as spaces usually populated by a majority of white students, faculty, and staff, college campuses can create an environment where the brown bodies of Latinas are decentered and disenfranchised

(Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Puwar, 2004; Yosso et al., 2009). This means that, as trespassers of a previously all-white and largely male space (Puwar, 2004), Chicanas' efforts of self-defining identities can be undermined by white and middle-class sociocultural values and standards (Mills, 1999). This includes the presence and roles of white women, who in their effort to promote feminism and change the university space, they have done so from a white-centric and middle-class position that has historically undermined the experiences of women of color and working class white women (hooks, 2000). In addition, Mexican American women may experience pressure or guilt from family and friends for trying to "be white," which pushes them to shape-shift and embody various identities at once (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Resistance and agency

As Nirmal Puwar (2004) theorizes, when a body enters a space that is not normally reserved for them (in this case a brown, female body into a university space traditionally inhabited by white and male bodies), it is changed and necessitates renegotiations of boundaries. Their entering the university space necessitated negotiations of acceptable expressions of race, gender, ethnicity, class and more. The inclusion of brown female bodies in higher education puts to test the boundaries of what has previously been imagined. Their very presence has an impact, which sometimes results in resistance to dominant ideologies that leads to structural change.

Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal worked on a resistance model that could take into account the nuanced forms of resistance that Chicana and Chicano students can engage in. They created this model as a way to complement scholarship done on traditional forms of resistance in schooling, which in their opinion focuses too much on self-defeating resistance (that is, resistance that further subordinates or oppresses the student while empowering the oppressor). They aim to show how Chicana/o students in fact have agency and can turn oppressive situations into more positive ones by engaging in "other forms of resistance that may lead to social transformation" (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 310).

To do this, they use a LatCrit lens to center the students' experiences as raced and gendered individuals whose marginalization and exclusion invalidate "traditional claims of the educational system to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 313). Through their understanding of resistance in schooling, I am able to see how my participants push their identities beyond the racialized gender expectations. An interesting finding inspired by this resistance model was that the students' ties to their families and communities kept them from engaging in self-defeating resistance and gave them the energy to resist white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.

The "subtle forms of resistance" that Delgado Bernal and Solórzano write about include conformist resistance and transformational resistance. Conformist resistance is when students "engage in activities and behavior within a more liberal tradition" (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 318). This is when the students want to make existing structures and systems work for the betterment of themselves and others. However, these approaches tend to result in temporary relief, not necessarily leading to social transformation, as they do not act on the structural causes of oppression. The authors predict that this may lead some students to "blame themselves, their families, or their culture for the negative personal and social conditions" (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 318). The other form of resistance they identify is *transformational resistance*. This is when students have a critical view of the structures that cause oppression and are motivated by a desire for social change. While students' behavior that exhibits transformational resistance has a better chance of resulting in social change rather than conformist resistance, it differs from self-defeating resistance in that it "does not serve to strengthen the oppression and domination of the person" (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 319).

There is a third, subtle form of resistance that Delgado Bernal and Solórzano identify through their reading of Tara Yosso's (2000) work. Yosso observed students' attempts to "prove others wrong" (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 319), where the students were motivated to work hard and succeed within existing structures as a way to

combat stigmas, stereotypes and deficit thinking about Mexicanas/os and Chicanas/os. They are simultaneously motivated to elevate the image of other Mexicanas/os and Chicanas/os. She names this type of resistance *resilient resistance*, and defines it as "surviving and/or succeeding through the educational pipeline as a strategic response to visual microaggressions" (quoted from Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 320). This type of resistance lies between transformational resistance and conformist resistance, because students are able to succeed yet they leave the structures of domination intact.

How it comes together

In my thesis, I propose that the mestiza consciousness is what allows the students in my study to not only draw from the pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001), but also from the various (often contradictory) discourses they encounter in college. This includes dominant discourses that promote color-blindness and meritocracy, as well as oppositional discourses that challenge white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Dolores Delgado Bernal (2001) writes that constructing identities as Mexican women can have both positive and negative effects on students' schooling. For example, it may allow them to overcome patriarchal expectations from their home communities that push one set of gender expectations. However, at other times, adopting a dominant ideology can make it hard for them to pinpoint or name the oppression they feel in the university. The theories outlined in this section color the lenses through which I will study the experiences of six Mexican American, female, undergraduate students at The University of Texas. As mentioned before, my research project aims to uncover the mechanics behind Mexican American women's identity construction at UT. To do this, I ask the following research questions: How do the Mexican American, female students negotiate the university space and structure in their transition from their home? What discourses and ideologies do they pick up and drop in order to construct new identities in college? What are the ways in which they "talk back" to the dominant ideologies and structures to exercise their agency? What impact and potential change do they enact on the social structures and context at UT Austin? The following section describes my approach and my methods.

METHODOLOGY

Collecting the data

For this project, I recruited six undergraduate, female, Mexican American students from The University of Texas at Austin in June, 2012. All of the students were between the ages of 21 and 22, and were either juniors or seniors, except for one who had just graduated in May. First, I conducted a three-hour focus group discussion with all six students in a classroom at The University of Texas at Austin. Shortly after, I followed up with four of those students through individual, two-hour interviews in a study room in one of UT's libraries. Following Patricia Lina Leavy's essay *The Practice of Feminist Oral History and Focus Group Interviews* (2007), I conducted the focus group discussion first because the group discussion allowed me to begin exploring my main questions. As Leavy writes, "this method allows the researcher to gain data, such as attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences, from a range of respondents at once, [which] may help direct future research" (Leavy, 2007, p. 172). What I learned about the individual and group experiences of my research participants during the focus group discussion informed the questions guide for the in-depth interviews.

The focus group and in-depth interviews consisted of a small sample because my goal was to "look at a 'process' [and] the 'meanings' individuals attribute to their given social situation," (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). While I do not wish to make overarching generalizations about Mexican American students, I do want to focus on the importance of specifically looking at the intersection of gender, race and class in Mexican American female students' identity formation in college. This is because I understand feminist research as "research that gets at *an understanding of women's lives and those of other oppressed groups*, research that promotes *social justice and social change*" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 117) (emphasis original).

Moreover, I used Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy's *Feminist Research Practice: A primer* (2007) to reflect on my role as both an "insider" (a student who is read as Latino) and an outsider (the researcher, an older student, and a man). Throughout this process, I put great effort to "understand my particular personal and

research standpoints and what role I play in the interview process in terms of my power and authority over the interview situation" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 114). While I cannot claim full success, I aimed to bridge the power relations between my participants and me through establishing *rapport* and practicing *reflexivity.* The latter informed my understanding of how "a researcher recognizes, examines, and understands how his or her own social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 129). Thus, I must say that due to my own positionality, I inevitably write myself into my research as a male, heterosexual and class-privileged researcher and graduate student at UT Austin.

Analyzing the Data: Barbara Pamphilon's *Zoom Model* and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*

"The zoom model has been developed to maximize the multiple levels of meaning found in a life history" (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 393). It has allowed me to focus on different details of my participants' lives, including personal views, their position in society, their movement through different spaces, people's reactions to them, and the interactions between all these levels of interest. Zooming in and out of different levels of a participant's experience also allows me to pay attention to different details when something is not adding up, appears to be contradictory, or appears to lack validity. This method also allows me to "understand the impacts of discourses as they were taken up or rejected" (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 394) by the students, "and to see in turn how this enabled or constrained their notions of themselves" (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 394) as women, as Mexican American or Indigenous, and as college students. This is because entering the university space necessitated negotiations of acceptable expressions of race, gender, ethnicity, class and more.

Like Barbara Pamphilon, I was faced with the challenge of most of my participants explaining their experience in college as "overwhelmingly positive" (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 394). After all, they have overcome many odds to come to university and are on their last stages of their college career. They were successful in leaving home and transitioning to college life, and have adopted a liberal ideology of

education where they are discouraged from seeing how race and gender play a factor in their experiences. Moreover, as Pamphilon explains, in telling me their story they are reconstructing their past, not resurrecting it. Their experiences may appear overwhelmingly positive because the telling of their stories is a process of "self-constructing," as the students are "creating" themselves in the process. I agree with my participants' view that coming to college has been a great experience, yet as a researcher I have to approach their stories in a way that will allow me to unravel and name what is messy and hard to pinpoint.

Another benefit of the zoom model is that it encourages me to account for my own biases and work with my active research voice (as opposed to denying I have one). To understand their social position, I read their experiences under a Chicana feminist lens. This helped me understand their positioning as Mexican/Chicana/Indigena women as well as my position as a male, heterosexual, middle-class international student. In addition, following Linda Tuhiwai Smith's "decolonizing methodologies," (L. T. Smith, 1999) I also positioned myself as a researcher with many privileges and biases. Specifically, she problematizes Eurocentric perspectives, which are "implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism" (L. T. Smith, 1999) and tend to erase or appropriate marginalized people's knowledge. Nevertheless, I am accountable to my research participants and other Mexican American, female students at UT, and choose to adopt an anti-colonial stance in my work to minimize my appropriation if their knowledge.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A treacherous path: making it to UT Austin as a Mexican woman

Gaining admission to The University of Texas at Austin is not an easy feat if you are a Mexican American or Chicana woman. According to the 2010 census, Texas is a majority/minority state, with Hispanic students making up 37.6% of the population, African Americans making up 11.5%, Asians 5.6%, and whites 45.3% (Torres, 2011). As the flagship university of the state of Texas, The University of Texas at Austin, a public institution, should have a student population that reflects the state's population. However,

according to *The University of Texas 2010-2011 Statistical Handbook: Students*, proportionally, the student population is only 17.6% Hispanic and 4.2% Black, compared to 51.0% white and 15.1% Asian.

It can be seen that Hispanic and Black people are underrepresented at The University of Texas, while Asians and whites are overrepresented. Although affirmative action and specific race-based programs once made a significant difference in the enrollment and experiences of students of color at UT Austin, the regents of UT Austin have historically made it difficult for race to be used as a factor for enrollment decisions and for resources to be given to students of color (Goldstone, 2006). On more recent times, students have been the ones challenging affirmative action. On September 29, 1992, two white, female students from Texas (Cheryl Hopwood and Stephanie Haynes) filed a lawsuit against the UT law school, "charging that they were being denied the constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law" (Goldstone, 2006, p. 150) after the law school rejected them, "while admitting what Hopwood and Haynes argued were less qualified African Americans" (Goldstone, 2006, p. 150). This shows how students of color have not only faced scrutiny about their right to attend university from the administrators, regents and legislators, but also from potential or actual fellow students who do not believe they are worthy of admission. The lawfulness of affirmative action was upheld on the August 19, 1994 *Hopwood* case, when Judge Sam Sparks recognized the importance of "overcoming past effects of discrimination" (Goldstone, 2006, p. 150) and found their applications to contain non-race based weaknesses. However, the plaintiffs appealed. Thus, on March 18, 1996, the *Hopwood, et al., v. State of Texas, et al.* case at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit overturned the previous judge's ruling. Quoted from Goldstone, the new ruling said, "the use of race to achieve a diverse student body, whether as a proxy for permissible characteristics, simply cannot be a state interest compelling enough to meet the steep standard of strict scrutiny" (Goldstone, 2006, p. 151).

This led to Texas Attorney General Dan Morales' decision to advise Texas colleges and universities "to operate on a race-neutral basis" (Goldstone, 2006, p. 151) in

August, 1996, which affected recruiting, retention and tutoring programs aimed at minorities. According to Dwonna Goldstone, he also advised UT officials to "dismantle a three-hundred-thousand-dollar-a-year minority hiring program that had helped to bring record number of African American and Hispanic professors to UT's campus between 1988 and 1997" (Goldstone, 2006, p. 151). This ruling affected not only the diversity of the student body, but also of faculty, which according to the university's 2010-2011 statistical handbook, is 80% white[1]. Goldstone notes with dismay that, forty-seven years after being asked to integrate, UT stopped considering race as a factor for admissions and retention of students. After the 2003 *Grutter v. Bollinger* Michigan case, race was again considered a lawful factor in admitting students to university, though it could not be a deciding factor.

Goldstone assigns the challenges to the concept of racial diversity to white Americans' discourse of color-blindness. This is a discourse where, as opposed to the social environment during the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, liberals consider that talking about race is now taboo and seen as racist in itself. Under this discourse, having race as a consideration for admissions is seen as "reverse discrimination" (Goldstone, 2006, p. 152), an argument used to dismantle programs that help minority students at a national level. This can also be seen in contemporary Supreme Court cases, such as *Fisher v. University of Texas* (Oliver, 2012), where a white, female student argues that she has suffered from reverse discrimination after being denied admission to UT.

In order to address the gap left by the *Hopwood* case, then-Governor George W. Bush signed into law the "Top 10 Percent Plan," where students who graduate in the top ten percent of their high school class are automatically admitted to any public university in Texas. This law is supposed to increase enrollment of minority students into Texas colleges and universities only because it capitalizes on the fact that K-12 schools around the state of Texas remain incredibly segregated (Frankenberg et al., 2010; Niu et al., 2008; Tienda & Niu, 2006). Unfortunately, this plan does *not* address the lack of Black and Chicana/o students in *graduate programs* at UT, where only 9.6% of the students are

[1] The University of Texas at Austin 2010 - 2011 Statistical Handbook: Faculty and Staff

Hispanic, while 2.9% are Black and 52.6% are white (foreign students like me compose 24.0% of all graduate students). In addition, as Goldstone laments, "the most compelling issue that the Top 10 Percent Plan does not address, however, is African American and Hispanic American students' lingering feelings of mistrust" (Goldstone, 2006, p. 152).

Still, not even this law has helped alleviate diversity issues at UT Austin significantly. According to Frankenberg et. al, 75% of Latino charter school students (K-12) and 67% of Latino public school students (K-12) are in racially isolated schools (Frankenberg et al., 2010). Moreover, "over 40% of high school seniors were exposed to extreme segregation—attending either predominantly minority or predominantly white schools, [and] less than one in four Texas seniors attended integrated schools" (Tienda & Niu, 2006). Given Texas' deeply segregated schooling, one would expect to see higher number of Hispanic sutdents in college under the top ten percent law. However, as Tienda (2006) writes in *Capitalizing on Segregation, Pretending Neutrality: College Admissions and the Texas Top 10% Law,* in a majority white, predominantly white, or integrated school, whites and Asians are more likely to qualify for the top 10% rule when compared to their overall state populations. Moreover, in integrated schools, Black students are more competitive with White students than Hispanic students, who are the lowest achieving group in the state (Tienda & Niu, 2006). Taking all of this into consideration, it can be seen that getting through the educational pipeline and into university in Texas is a significant feat if you are a Hispanic student.

But why are Latinos in Texas facing so many challenges in school? Education scholars have identified several reasons that are unique to Latinas/os' intersecting identities as racial minorities, immigration status, language, and more. Tara Yosso writes that Hispanic students and their families and communities are understood by K-12 schools as not holding any real or valuable knowledge (Yosso, 2005), leading to deficit thinking about their capabilities, their communities and their values. Dolores Delgado Bernal also notes the same of universities, arguing that the lack of recognition of Chicana/o students as legitimate holders of knowledge marginalizes them (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Moreover, Yosso argues that the curriculum, broadly conceived as both

teaching practices and the content of the classes and books, are white centric and explain the world from a white, middle-class and heteropatriarchal point of view (Yosso, 2002a). This makes schooling a marginalizing experience for students of color and female students (including white women). In addition, Angela Valenzuela writes that Mexican youth in Texas too often attend overcrowded, underfunded, English-only, segregated schools that do not recognize the students' needs as members of a racial minority whose parents or themselves are immigrants (Valenzuela, 1999). Instead, schools consider Mexican students to be inherently deficient, Spanish is devalued and often prohibited, and the curriculum assumes and promotes the normalcy of whiteness, heteropatriarchy, English and the middle class. This results in *subtractive schooling*, where the schools "divest [Mexican] youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 3).

The only student in my study who had something positive to say about their high school was Fabiola, who attended an integrated school and said there was a competitive atmosphere about it. Blanca and Jessica did not express a direct opinion on the quality of their previous education, except that when they finally got to the university they realized just how hard it was, which reflected that their schooling had not prepared them for university. Natalia, Angie, and Mary, however, did express their opinions about the schooling system:

> I just kinda always felt kinda stuck because the school wasn't that great, like, a lot of the times we would just be in class and the teachers would kinda just give up on students, so we'd just be sitting there doing nothing. And I don't know, it just had a bad reputation. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

> When going to like my physics class, [the teacher] was like "ok so we only got one rocket and it's a leftover from some other high school." So we only had one, so he was like "I guess we can't do this." So like it was a lot of things like that, where like, disparities? Where only some people got some and some didn't. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

> If you don't live in a good neighborhood, you're not gonna be in a good school system. And the way neighborhoods are divided, it's usually by race. So minorities always get the lower education. And so, from since like early on you're already behind. (Mary, Social Work)

Latinidad: A pedagogy of racism and sexism

Another aspect that contextualizes this project is Latinidad. Various scholars identified the 1990s as the time of "Latin Explosion," where a hypervisibility of Latina/o bodies and culture lead to the development of the term *Latinidad* (Mendible, 2007; Paredez, 2009; Valdivia, 2010). Deborah Paredez (2009) identifies it as the "cultural and commercial iconization" of Latina bodies and cultures (Paredez, 2009, p. 5). Angharad Validivia (2010) defines Latinidad as "the process of being and/or becoming Latina/o," which is heavily mediated by mass media and the circulation of commodified images of Latina bodies, identities and culture. Virtually all Latina and Latino bodies are read through a lens of Latinidad in contemporary culture. This lens presumes a set shared of understandings about Latinas, so when people encounter a Latina body it "[evokes] a set of predictable responses ('she' is hot-blooded, tempestuous, hypersexual, and in current manifestations has a big butt)" (Mendible, 2007, p. 1).

Myra Mendible (2007) describes "the Latina body" as "a convenient fiction – a historically contingent, mass-produced combination of myth, desire, location, marketing, and political expedience" (Mendible, 2007, p. 1). As racial and gender subordinates, U.S. mainstream culture cannot accept Latinas as complicated or agentic individuals. Instead, the Latina body must be safely contained within highly sexualized, raced and gendered stereotypes bound by full lips, brown bodies and big butts. Media representations are only one (but a very powerful) way these stereotypes are reproduced. Whether a Latina student embodies or not all the assumed aspects of Latinidad in her physical appearance or gender performance, when a student, faculty or staff finds out that a student is Latina, the responses to her may presume a notion of what she *should* be (Molinary, 2007), not who she really is.

The problem with Latina stereotypes and Latinidad is that, in a segregated society such as the U.S., the media serves as a way to teach members of the dominant group how to interact with racialized others (Childs, 2009). Tara Yosso argues that "racism, as well as gender- and class-based oppression, in the United States is perpetuated in the form of entertainment media (film, advertising, television, and magazines)" (Yosso, 2002, p. 52).

In her view, "both schools and media teach to a mass audience, using curriculum informed by racism, sexism, and classism" (Yosso, 2002, p. 53). This curriculum shapes the interactions between people from different races. For example, Rosy Molinary describes in *Hijas Americanas: Beauty, Body Image, And Growing Up Latina* (Molinary, 2007) that her college experiences with white students, faculty and staff were loaded with assumptions about her sexuality. She writes, "It seemed as if my womanhood meant sex and sensuality more than other women's; […] as if by merit of my ethnicity I was promiscuous and born to procreate" (Molinary, 2007, pp. 8-9).

Because Texas has highly segregated communities and schools (Frankenberg et al., 2010; Tienda & Niu, 2006), students, faculty and staff from various backgrounds may be coming into contact with Latinas for the first time at UT (Yosso et al., 2009). In these cases, Latinidad can be the most accessible frame of reference from which to (mis)recognize Latina bodies on campus. In a campus where 51% of students[2] and 80% of faculty are white[3], and only 17% of students are Latinos, the probability exists for white students and faculty to draw on the prevailing social images to see Latinas as hypersexual, out of control, and impossible to educate. Thus, responses to their bodies, especially if they read certain bodies as "authentically" Latina (brown, curvaceous), can put Latinas at risk of racial and gender discrimination. This marginalization can come in the shape of nuanced comments about their sexuality or their right to be in the university (and even in the country), to actual assaults on their bodies.

Mexican American women in higher education

Because of the unique construction of Mexican American women in U.S. society, the intersection of race and gender make their experiences different from Chicano men and from white women, two of the populations whose stories and identities have been studied significantly more when it comes to education and identity (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Hyams, 2000; Reyes III, 2009; Villalpando,

[2] The University of Texas at Austin 2010 - 2011 Statistical Handbook: Students
[3] The University of Texas at Austin 2010 - 2011 Statistical Handbook: Faculty and Staff

2003; Yosso, 2002a, 2005). Latinidad and the Mexican American stereotypes that derive from it intersect with a racist and sexist history of most (if not all) US college campuses, resulting in a unique experience for Chicanas that focuses on their bodies, their alleged hypersexuality, and the assumptions of how this sexuality influences their behavior.

Before delving in deeper into that unique experience, I should note that my research project is in conversation with the work of Dolores Delgado Bernal the most closely, as she has tried to implement Chicana feminism into research of Latinas/os along the educational pipeline, including identity formation in higher education (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). She writes that there is a history of overlooking the experiences of Chicana and Mexicana students in the social sciences and ethnic studies literature. Therefore, she tries to fill this gap by examining how Chicanas use strategies that they "learn in the home and successfully employ when confronted with challenges and obstacles that impede their academic achievement and college participation" (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 623). She proposes that the *mestiza consciousness* is one way by which Chicana students can draw from knowledge gained at home (what she calls "pedagogies of the home") to overcome obstacles (such as racism and sexism) and make it to college.

Delgado Bernal's diverse body of work around identities (Delgado Bernal, 2001), Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) and resistance theory (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) allows me to understand how Chicana and Mexicana students can draw from different cultural resources to resist normalizing forces and exercise agency as they construct their identities. She writes, "Chicana feminist pedagogies focus on the ways Chicanas teach, learn, and live the foundations for balancing and resisting systems of oppression" (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 624). Mexican American women have also been considered to draw from knowledge they have gained from navigating the world in their brown bodies (Cruz, 2001; Moya, 2002), while a lot of their energy and motivation to break cycles of oppression comes from their commitment to their families or even social justice (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). For example, "in a white supremacist society where emphasis is placed on

assimilating to Anglo norms, practices and values, claiming an identity, maintaining one's language, and affirming one's culture are all individual acts of resistance" (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 625-626).

Returning to the focus of Latinas and their bodies, in *"Pay attention in class…[and] don't get pregnant": A discourse of academic success among adolescent Latinas*, Melissa Hyams (2000) explores identity construction through qualitative research of a group of Latina teenages in an urban high school in Los Angeles. She argues that "for these young women, studenthood is not a generic stage in the life course, but one that is embedded in society's expectations of and anxieties about young women" (Hyams, 2000, p. 635). Hyams also describes that the Latinas in her study identify that academic success depends on their "sexual morality and their behavior as feminine gendered and heterosexual beings" (Hyams, 2000, p. 635).

The discourse dominating Mexican female sexuality influences their identities as students because of the way Mexican women have been constructed into white American society. Latina sexuality, reproduction and fertility have been socially constructed as threats to the white American national identity (Chavez, 2008). Leo Chavez writes that "Latina reproduction and fertility, especially of Mexican immigrant women, have been ground zero in a war of not just words but also public policies and laws" (Chavez, 2008, p. 71). The biological and social reproduction capabilities of Mexican-origin women are seen as a threat to white people's majority status and political and cultural power. This is a discourse that, as Chavez explains, has been reproduced over the past few decades through magazines, news reports, academic papers, and popular cultural products. Moreover, he writes:

> "Latina reproduction" as an object of a discourse produces a limited range of meanings, often focusing on their supposedly excessive reproduction, seemingly abundant or limitless fertility, and hypersexuality, all of which are seen as 'out of control' in relation to the supposed social norm. (Chavez, 2008, p. 72)

Knowing how Mexican women's alleged out-of-control sexuality is understood by mainstream (white) American culture, the students in Hyam's study started practicing "symbolic constraints of (self)-control and protection of Latina female sexuality"

(Hyams, 2000, p. 640). Through these practices, the young Mexicanas and Chicanas believed they were representing themselves as "mature" and "smart" girls worthy of education. Hyams describes how the girls in her study are not only self-regulated, but regulated by external forces that control their "social interactions, spatial mobility, appearance, and bodily comportment" (Hyams, 2000, p. 641).

The students' anxieties over their conduct and their need to show "self-control" led to particular behaviors reflected in literature about Mexican Americans in education. Enrique Aleman Jr. writes that female, Mexican American students "are socialized and encouraged to be 'overly pleasing' via a 'tyranny of niceness'" (Aleman Jr., 2009, p. 291). This is because "liberal ideology and Whiteness privileges niceness, civility, and commonalities, which only serves to maintain the status quo, covers up institutionalized racism, and silences the experiences of marginalized students and communities" (Aleman Jr., 2009, p. 291). On the one hand, Chicanas make it through the educational pipeline by adopting the ideology of a "nice" girl. On the other hand, "educational settings systemically oppress, exclude, and damage students of color, ultimately rendering these settings devoid of *niceness* toward these student populations" (Aleman Jr., 2009, p. 291). This means that even if they adopt the "good student, good Mexican woman" identity, the students are not guaranteed a place in the university.

As Yosso et. al write in *Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates*, Latinas in college face "ongoing racialized and gendered incidents questioning their academic merit, cultural knowledge, and physical presence" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 659). In other words, they are questioning the right for the brown and female students to occupy the traditionally white (and male) space of the university, repositioning them as subordinate. This is particularly perilous because "de facto segregation in K-12 schooling further exacerbates the disproportionate underrepresentation of Latina/o undergraduates and shapes what may be the first opportunity for academic interaction between Latinas/os and Whites" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 660). As Yosso et al. write, gender and "racial microaggressions cause stress to their victims, who must decipher the insult and then decide whether and how to respond"

(Yosso et al., 2009, p. 661). Sometimes this stress causes students to drop classes and even change career paths.

Another factor that affects students in higher education is the feeling of being a "minority" and the impact this has on their academic life. This is explained by Yosso, et al. as the "campus racial climate." As many of my participants expressed, coming to UT was the first time they ever felt they were Mexican. Something (or someone) made them feel this way. This is because, as Yosso, et al. write, the racial and gender microaggressions can be systematic. Other than feeling singled out through sheer demographics, students can feel isolated and marginalized through a white-centric and androcentric curriculum. In *Toward a Critical Race Curriculum*, Tara Yosso (2002) defines curriculum as the structures in place that allow professors to present specific knowledge in specific classes. If this knowledge only recognizes the white, middle class (and mostly male, heterosexual) experience, it creates a racial and gender climate where Mexican, female students can feel marginalized and their experiences invalidated. This can happen both in terms of formal (class structure and books) and informal (professor attitudes and pedagogical style) methods of presenting this knowledge.

Moreover, Yosso writes that "curriculum is supported by *discourses* that justify why some students have access to certain knowledge while others are presented with different school curriculum" (Yosso, 2002, p. 93). A white-centric education will disseminate knowledge that shows Mexican Americans, for example, in subordinate positions to white people. Yosso continues, "traditional curricular discourses distort, omit, and stereotype Chicana/o, Latina/o, African American, Asian American/Asian Pacific Islander, and Native American experiences" (Yosso, 2002, p. 93). These discourses help maintain the status quo in terms of racial and gender domination from Pre-K through university (Yosso, 2002a). In Texas, this has been exemplified by the recent takeover of social conservatives over the state textbook committee. As a result, they have put pressure to take the history of racialized minorities out of the public school textbooks (McKinley Jr., 2010).

Another great contribution from Yosso is her argument that students are filtered through the educational pipeline before they come to college. Most of the students in my study reported being at the top of their class and took AP courses in high school, which Yosso identifies as structures that filter out those who do not conform to and accept the white and middle class values in education. This may result in the internalizing of oppression on the part of the Mexican American students that manage to come to college. Since what they learn is produced from a white, middle-class and often-male perspective, the students may see their own culture under a deficit lens. The students themselves often do not realize how they are participating in an education system that has "spoken and unspoken narratives [that] serve to maintain racial, gender, and class inequality" (Yosso, 2002, p. 94). While I do not deny that the students worked really hard to attain their academic success, the "meritocracy" discourse of liberal ideology disguises racism, classism and sexism inherent in the schooling system (Yosso, 2002a).

Liberalism, tolerance, and the racial contract

In *Space Invaders: Race, gender and bodies out of place*, Nirmal Puwar (2004) explains that while there are no longer any legal or formal barriers to keep women of color out of the universities and other privileged spaces, nevertheless there exist conditions that they must abide by in order to be accepted by the male and Eurocentric epistemic authorities. When women and racialized minorities enter a space not historically reserved for them, it is "an encounter that causes disruption, necessitates negotiation and invites complicity" (Puwar, 2004, p. 1). The inclusion of brown female bodies in higher education puts to test the boundaries of what has previously been imagined. Their very presence has an impact.

As explained earlier, to manage any anxieties that may arise from their presence, students invest a lot of energy in presenting themselves as individuals who are in control of their bodies and their emotions, and therefore do not present a threat to the status quo. Other than their sexuality, women of color are encouraged to control their anger towards people who insult them and marginalize them. In other words, they need to be tolerant of

these attacks. In *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, Wendy Brown argues that the discourse of tolerance is a subtle way to uphold ideologies of domination such as white supremacy. She calls it an "artifact of social knowledge" (Brown, 2006, p. 1) used mostly by liberals. The discourse was taken up at the end of the twentieth century as marginalized peoples started formally entering spaces of privilege.

Regardless of how the students are making sense of why or how they should integrate tolerance into their lives, the result is censorship that allows racism, sexism and classism to exist around them. Brown writes, "tolerance nevertheless produces and positions subjects, orchestrates meanings and practices of identity, marks bodies, and conditions political subjectivities" (Brown, 2006, p. 4). It regulates racial, ethnic and sexual difference by marking them (Mexican American, female) as tolerable, while simultaneously labeling mainstream culture as "neutral" ground from which to judge what is tolerable and what is not. In other words, tolerance "iterates the normalcy of the powerful and the deviance of the marginal" (Brown, 2006, p. 8). It is a discourse that "regulates the presence of the Other" (Brown, 2006, p. 8) while at the same time it congratulates "liberals" for having the "good" vision of society.

While adopting a liberal ideology such as tolerance, color-blindness and meritocracy rewards the students if they follow the rules, it also means that students only have a narrow way of constructing their identities. But why do they adopt these ideologies? Part of the answer can come from Charles Mills' (1999) *The Racial Contract*. He defines the racial contract as a "set of formal and informal agreements or meta-agreements" between humans considered white (a class of "full persons"), and "the remaining subset of humans as 'nonwhite' and of a different and inferior moral status" (Mills, 1999, p. 11). In other words, non-whites are integrated into society as long as they agree to forego some of their rights and limit their identities. Mills adds that the racial contract is also an epistemic contract, which privileges white epistemic authority. This means that the racial contract requires that people subscribe to the "common sense" of both patriarchy and white supremacy. Through both of these logics, the world must be seen as white males see it. Since the majority of white men do not validate colonialism,

racism and sexism as "real," women, nonwhites and their white allies must operate within a world that denies them the validity of their experience with these barriers and discourses, while still believing that everyone is free and equal. Mills adds:

> So here, it could be said, one has an agreement to *misinterpret* the world. One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by the white epistemic authority. (Mills, 1999, p. 18)

Maintaining this version of reality, even in the face of colonialism, racism and sexism, requires tremendous effort and comes at a great cost. Mills writes that signatories of the racial contract "will live in an invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland, a 'consensual hallucination.'" (Mills, 1999, p. 19)

Moving On…

With the context and literature in mind, my contribution is an analysis of the identity construction of Mexican American women in The University of Texas at Austin as they enter and negotiate a historically white and male space as brown women. I have organized my information into three chapters: (1) First, I look at the parameters of the identity of the "good student, good Mexican woman" and its implications; (2) I then move on to the microaggressions that discipline and regulate the integration of Mexican women into UT Austin; (3) I end with an analysis of the sites and forms of resistance that the students in this project practice.

Chapter 1: "You better not get pregnant!": The De(limit)ations of The "Good Student, Nice Mexican Woman" Identity in College

It is the intersection of gender and race that makes Mexican women's experiences in college different from other students. By listening to my six participants' stories, I found that as women and as racialized individuals there are certain standards they need to meet if they are to find a space along the educational pipeline and ultimately in college. This is because, as Nirmal Puwar (2004) argues, their inclusion in a space historically devoid of women and minorities necessitates a renegotiation of power relations so that students, faculty and staff with privilege (white, middle-class, and often male) can continue to enjoy their position of power in a racial, class and gender hierarchy. Drawing from Michel Foucault, Melissa Hyams writes that "in a regime of disciplinary power […] normalizing or pathologizing mechanisms subjectivise individuals through differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization, and exclusion" (Hyams, 2000, p. 648). In my project, I found that by pathologizing Mexican culture and Mexican women's sexuality, unwanted behavior is demarcated in educational institutions. If the Mexican women do not reject the unwanted behavior, they are punished by being excluded from education. In other words, they fall out of the educational pipeline and never make it to college (Hyams, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2002a). They are instead encouraged to think like the rest of the students, adopting a liberal ideology and believing that they indeed have as much a shot of "making it" as white and middle class students (Urrieta Jr., 2009; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2002a). Therefore, difference is regulated along the educational pipeline by allowing only certain Mexican women to be in AP classes and eventually make it to college—those who assimilate more to white, middle-class values. The students in my study made it to UT Austin by shaping their identities around being disciplined Mexican women, a discourse that plays out uniquely for them.

Interestingly, like Barbara Pamphilon (the scholar who developed the zoom model discussed in my methodology section) I was faced with the challenge of most of my participants explaining their experience in college as "overwhelmingly positive"

(Pamphilon, 1999, p. 394). Indeed, coming to college has helped them learn so much and grow tremendously, providing avenues to push the boundaries of their identities, especially those set by their parents or high schools. Nevertheless, through the use of the "zoom model" I identified common patterns in all of their experiences reflected by anxieties over how they presented themselves particularly to white and middle class students and faculty. These anxieties revolved around their sexuality, gendered behavior (such as being seen as nice and respectful women), their appearance, and their distance from the pathologized Mexican culture. These were discourses they were expected to adopt on top of having to be exemplary students, which all went back to their intersecting identities as women and as Mexican Americans.

Another way I was able to find the contours of Mexican women's identity construction in college was by studying what they felt that white women could do but they could not. Leo Chavez (2008) writes that white women have social "roles [that] are more broadly defined to include education and work outside the home, and their sexuality and reproduction are positively viewed against the Other women of the Third World, including Mexican immigrant women and U.S.-born women of Mexican descent" (Chavez, 2008, p. 74). They have more control than Latinas over how they construct their identities as wives, mothers and professionals, while Latina identity is "subject to redefinition by the larger society" (Chavez, 2008, p. 74). This is because white women are seen to have normative fertility and sexuality, which is used to juxtapose Latina sexuality and fertility as inherently deviant. The result of constructing this dualism between white and Latina women is that white women are afforded "subject status," while Mexican women are not because "their behavior is viewed as irrational, illogical, chaotic, subject to tradition and superstition, and, therefore threatening" (Chavez, 2008, p. 74). Chavez makes the connection between sexuality and other societal expectations in that gendered social relations are organized according to sexual behavior. Therefore, the women in my study have to walk a very thin line if they are to overcome stigmas surrounding their sexuality to be accepted as educated, Mexican, professionals (Chavez, 2008; Hyams, 2000).

The students felt compelled to present themselves as students who: (a) recognize Mexican culture as pathologized; (b) have control over their sexuality and gender appearance (they are not pregnant and are not "cholas"); (c) have control over their emotions and are respectful and tolerant (in other words, they are not loud or confrontational Mexican women); and (d) fully accept UT Austin's "progressiveness" and "liberalism." In this chapter, I will explain how and why abiding by the guidelines listed above produces a very limiting discourse where a Mexican "woman's body and style instead of her attributes and potentialities becomes the locus of meaning in the negotiation of gender and sexual [and racial] identity" (Hyams, 2000, p. 649). Moreover, I will show how these limitations are unique to Mexican women, and the importance of studying the specificity of gender in Mexican, female college students' experiences.

ANXIETIES OVER MEXICAN/CHICANA FEMALE SEXUALITY, APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

While the six students in this project are proud of their families and their culture in different ways, they would simultaneously draw attention to and feel distressed over how pathologized Mexican culture is. Natalia, a senior bilingual education student from San Antonio, expressed that she and non-Mexicans looked down on Mexican culture because:

> A lot of [Mexican] people like, around 14, 16 years old, they would be getting pregnant or in gangs or something crazy like that. So, that's a lot of the culture. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

This idea, that it is the "culture" of Mexicans to be so "crazy" as to become pregnant young or become involved with the "wrong" people, was reiterated by Natalia and the rest of the students. While they would also say that there are exceptions (such as them) and that they are working hard in their careers to change this image in the eyes of white, middle class people, it was clear they were under pressure to *not* be the ones getting pregnant. Natalia continued:

> Still, to this day my dad's like: "you better not get pregnant!" (*the students laugh*) My dad's just always on me about that. Every single day. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

Hyams also found that there are other people who feel compelled to regulate young Mexican women's behavior. However, this is not necessarily done to be "unsupportive," as the students in my thesis reported, but because they actually believe young Mexican women need to be disciplined and their sexuality and gender needs to be controlled if they are to have a secure future. For example, Jessica, who had just graduated from Accounting and Management, also mentioned how half of her family was anxious over her leaving to Austin from El Paso:

> They didn't think you should leave. That you should stay in El Paso. That I should go to UTEP, like my cousins did. And that I just wanted to get away to be like a wild girl, you know? That it was like: "oh you don't even know what she's doing over there." (Jessica, Accounting and Management).

This anxiety over Mexican women's behavior also came from the schools themselves, as Mary, a senior from Eagle Pass (a border town) studying Social Work explained about her school counselor. When her parents made an appointment to talk with her about the possibility of Mary going away to college, she responded:

> She's like "No. That's a bad idea. These kids, they just wanna get away, and they just wanna party (*all the students laugh*) […] You are in the right to want for her to stay here. Like, don't let her leave. Don't, don't do that, do that to yourself, don't to that to her." (Mary, Social Work)

Because of the anxieties surrounding Mexican female sexuality, Hyams writes that through the "symbolic constraints of (self)-control and protection of Latina female sexuality" (Hyams, 2000, p. 640), young Mexicanas and Chicanas believe they are representing themselves as "mature" girls and "smart" girls worthy of an education. In my study, the rejection of "wild" or "crazy" behavior such as teen pregnancy or partying was repeated by the students, using it as evidence of their success and identities as good students and good Mexican women. Unfortunately, this rejection was articulated as a rejection of the "bad" aspects of Mexican culture without an analysis of why women become pregnant in the first place, or why Mexican youth would feel compelled to rebel and join gangs. Moreover, the idea that Mexican hypersexuality and hyperfertility are "out of control" seemed to be a common theme. Chavez (2008) notes that it is a trope

used to control and regulate Mexican Americans in the United States. In particular, Mexican women's capability of biological and social reproduction is seen as a threat to the nation (Chavez, 2008). The fact that "teen birth rates by age and race and Hispanic origin were lower in 2010 than ever reported in the United States" (Hamilton & Ventura, 2012, p. 1) is not taken into account by the students, who have already learned that Mexican women's sexuality is just something that is pathologized and feared. This is because the stereotype of Mexican women's hyperfertility is a powerful tool to demarcate deviance and filter the Mexican women who make it to university.

The rejection of Mexican culture's pathology was integral to the women forming identities as students. Hard work in school went beyond just getting good grades and into not getting pregnant or doing other "crazy" things, as Natalia explains:

> I feel that, like for [white, middle-class students], maybe that, [coming to college is] something that they're just supposed to do. That they're expected to do. But for us [Mexican students] it's like, amazing, you know? We don't get pregnant or something like that, or get into gangs, or drugs. So like, for us, it's a huge deal. It's an accomplishment to go to college and get educated. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

However, while Natalia and the others said that teen pregnancy and other social problems were part of the culture (even though they were not saying that it is unchangeable), she stood up for her culture when confronted by a white, female student. After this student mentioned to her how she understood that it was part of Mexican culture to become mothering teens, Natalia answered:

> "Yeah, it happens a lot, it's not like something that is praised. It's frowned upon." And so just knowing that people have that image of us, I thought that was sad. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

As it can be seen, pathologizing Mexican culture in order to identify how to behave is not something that comes easy to Mexican women. Pathologizing is an identity practice that causes pain, and it is through using it in combination with other discourses that these students can survive college and have an ambivalent relationship with both their home cultures (as there is not just one Mexican culture) and mainstream culture (or as Luis Urrieta calls it, the whitestream of schooling). Luis Urrieta discloses in *Working*

from Within: Chicana and Chicano Activist Educators in Whitestream Schools how he himself felt ashamed of his culture and his family because of the messages he received in school of what the "good" Mexicans were supposed to be. Still, amid the ambivalence, he found school to be the place where he could be praised and tracked into a path of success. He writes, "I learned to perform uncritically to my teachers' expectations and to in fact exceed them" (Urrieta Jr., 2009, p. 3). Similarly, Mary expressed:

> [My home] wasn't a very good environment, but at school teachers were always just telling me, like, that I had so much potential and that I was so smart and just felt so good to get like, all this positive feedback and so I always saw school as like my getaway […] Cause it just, it just felt good to be, to be recognized, and—and to see like that I was doing good. (Mary, Social work)

At home, the expectation was that she was going to attend a two-year community college and get married, "because you're, you're a girl" (Mary). Mary's parents felt compelled to control their daughter's sexuality one way, while she received messages from school and the media that she should control it another way: don't get pregnant, don't give us trouble, and assimilate to white culture. As Chavez (2008) writes, both expectations are informed by how Mexican women's sexuality is constructed as a threat to white identity and power. The difference is that the school can reward Mary with "positive" reinforcement along a whitestream educational path that denies her subjectivity; this is just done differently from her parents. It is important to note here that, while on the one hand teachers believe that assimilating to white culture is a harmless path to success, bell hooks (2003) sees "assimilation" as one method that reproduces white supremacy. This is because it is a way of negating cultural and ethnic difference and asserts whiteness as the only legitimate and good way of being and thinking (hooks, 2003). This includes adopting ideas of domination along a racial and gender hierarchy. Still, Mary and the other students navigated this treacherous terrain and chose what they felt was best for them. They had some power over the situation regardless of how others imposed their views on them. Coming to UT was a decision that, while it satisfied the expectations of teachers in them assimilating to white and middle class culture, still gave them an opportunity to push the boundary of their identities set by their parents.

Showing "self-control" is not just manifested in behavior that is rejected, but behavior that is adopted. This includes their gender presentation and properness. The main visual representation of an out-of-control Mexican woman is the "chola." A chola (a word that across the Americas was used to stigmatize people with Indigenous heritage) "looks" out of control: she wears big, hoop earrings, her makeup goes against white and middle class norms, her hair may be messy, her clothes "revealing," she owns her sexuality, and in general she is not "classy" (Bettie, 2000). A chola is also a Mexican woman who may reject schooling and society's expectations of them to assimilate to a white supremacist and heteropatriarchal world (Mendoza-Denton, 1996). As Norma Mendoza-Denton writes, it is a "style distinct from the mainstream, which is convinced they are acting like this *because* they are Mexican" (Mendoza-Denton, 1996, p. 51) (emphasis original). She continues, "both signifier and signified, the cholas' bodies are inscribed with the traces of conflict: assimilation, ethnic pride, covert prestige and the pride of survival" (Mendoza-Denton, 1996, p. 51). Interestingly, the students in my group still feel the conflict of assimilation and ethnic pride. This is because even though they can choose to not have the cholas' way of expressing discomfort with society, they cannot get rid of their brown skin. The cholas' style is a direct response to normalizing forces, but the women in my study will never fully integrate into the system because they still embody what others see as deviant. This can be very frustrating to them, but they cannot express their frustration if they are to be regarded as nice, proper women and rewarded with the opportunity to attend and graduate from college. For example, Natalia had a racist teacher in high school that castigated the students if they spoke Spanish, even though he spoke French in class because he was married to a French woman. He gave her a zero on an assignment because he did not believe she was capable of producing that quality of work. When describing how she felt, she said:

> I mean, my first reaction is to cry (*laughs*) cause like, I don't know, it's what I do, and then after that, I mean I have to be respectful of him anyway cause he's my teacher, it's not like I'm gonna be like "hey, you're my favorite teacher," and have these conversations [of racial discrimination]. I just try to keep a distance, keep calm, and just do what I need to do, and that's it. So, I guess in that situation that's what you need to do, just be respectful, yeah. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

Natalia's motivation to be perceived as a well-behaved student can also be attributed to her anxiety over not being seen as a chola, which is tied to appearance and is supposed to be the embodiment of the "bad" Mexican girl. However, this only affects Mexican female bodies, as observed by an excerpt from our interview:

> Juan: What stereotypes bother you the most about Mexican American women or Latinas in general?
>
> Natalia: Like, if they wear big earrings or paint their eyes a certain way, they're called like chola. I mean, like at other places they have the chola look, but they're not cholas. So like, why do we have to be cholas? I mean, the people who do decide to wear their style like that, and…
>
> Juan: So who gets away with it?
>
> Natalia: Like, I've seen like some of the Arab people, if they paint their eyes a certain way, they look like Mexicans sometimes. It's weird, and, I don't know their stereotypes or anything, but they're not cholas for sure.
>
> Juan: Why does it bother you, that one?
>
> Natalia: Because like a chola is like… being called a chola is offensive because you're ghetto and you sleep around and you're probably a drug user or something like that.

Embodying a chola image means embodying excess Mexicanness, when being Mexican is already seen as excess of sexuality and by extension bad behavior. Looking like a chola is a sure way to end an educational career. Mendoza-Denton writes that "cholas are also perceived as threatening to the teachers" (Mendoza-Denton, 1996, p. 50). In order to be taken seriously and stay in the educational pipeline, Fabiola says:

> I don't like to carry myself off like, typical, like, you know, they'll have like the chola kind of stigma […] [Mainstream people] will be quick to judge [and be] a lot quicker to not give you the time of day and not listen to you […] And if you're like that, well then, all those other stereotypes are going to fall straight on you. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

By stereotypes, Fabiola was referring to being seen as uneducated, being talked down to because of low social status, being a criminal, and more. To avoid these, she

insists on the importance of looking presentable, because if she looks excessively "Latina" or "Mexican," the risks for white people to see her as hypersexual, uneducated, and just someone not worth acknowledging. However, to be presentable is to not call attention to yourself and blend in. Fabiola expressed that she tries to wear what is in fashion in Austin, and attributed it to her being a "girly-girl." While this may be true, it is also true that if she had wanted to wear a different style of clothes, she probably could have not.

The cholas' tie to abnormal sexuality is also linked to appearance and gender performance. For Natalia, just looking like a chola insinuates out of control sexuality and other behavioral problems. Along the lines of appearance, Natalia also elucidates how clothing has a role to play in the proper presentation of nice Mexican girls, particularly as it relates to their (hyper)sexuality. When discussing how she dislikes Mexican media and changing Mexican trends when she visits family in Mexico, she laments how some Mexican shows feature reggaeton[4] contests with women who "reveal everything they've got" (Natalia). She mentioned:

> [There was a] separate show for kids, and they were little girls and little boys like dancing together, like really nasty and I'm like 'what's this?' […] I guess it's just my experience here in the U.S. like this kind of stuff would never be tolerated, like it would be considered like something like, for pedophiles, I guess (slight laugh). (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

At the same time, she acknowledged:

> I know it's like a different culture in that sense, like it's not something viewed like perverted, but still like, it's just something weird, and I wouldn't like my daughter to be—grow up with that kind of thing. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

So why is it so different for her? She was watching the show with her Mexican family in Mexico, but through Mexican American/Chicana eyes. There is knowledge that is created from experiencing the world as a brown, Mexican woman in the United States, where stereotypes of Mexican women's hypersexuality puts pressure on her to hide, as

[4] A rhythmic music stemming from Puerto Rico but popular particularly in urban settings in the United States. The dance moves can sometimes reflect sexual moves.

much as possible, her brown body (not expose it). The fear of being judged as a sexual object first and foremost may have driven her to reject these images from Mexico, with a focus on judging the dress and the performance of femininity (and by extension sexuality). Similarly, Blanca spoke of the importance of appearance to her family:

> I know that's actually really a big deal for my family, it's all about appearance and how you carry yourself because apparently everyone judges you and like if you just walk out like that, you know, you gotta put on makeup and get your hair done, all this other stuff. (Blanca, Art)

The Mexican women felt they were judged according to how they present themselves, which was supposed to also be a reflection of their controlled sexuality and their mild, feminine character. They are expected to be tolerant, educated women, not loud and rebellious women like cholas. In other words, to be accepted as educated professionals, the students I interviewed have to build an identity around "niceness." The discourse of niceness has a history in education. Aleman Jr. writes that female, Mexican students "are socialized and encouraged to be 'overly pleasing' via a 'tyranny of niceness'" (Aleman Jr., 2009, p. 291). Because students are constantly told throughout the educational pipeline to believe in meritocracy and equality, if they speak out against racial or gender discrimination the female students are no longer "nice," no longer acceptable. The university as an educational space that promises success and opportunities is also "highly contested and political in nature" (Aleman Jr., 2009, p. 291), where marginalized students stand the most to lose if they challenge the status quo. As Hyams argues, the students who make it through the educational pipeline to become successful are the ones who learn to control themselves, including their anger. For example, my participants observed that white women were loud and even offensive when fighting for their points of view, but my research participants felt like they could never be like that. If they were to adopt these behaviors (which are regarded as positive in other students), they would lose their image as respectable and "nice" Mexican women. I will talk more about the idea of being "nice" below. For now, it is important to keep in mind how "niceness" is intricately linked to their education, as Natalia observed:

> I've heard this Mexican saying. I don't know it in Spanish, but I just kind of heard it around, like it doesn't matter how knowledgeable you are, how much you go to the university and study, like you're not educated if you don't know how to respect people. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

Others agreed, and this was reflected when every one of them told me at least of one experience where they were offended by someone who took advantage of their racial or gender privilege. The concept of being "educada" in Spanish is different from "education" in English, in that it also includes codes of conduct for proper behavior. For the students in this study, it meant that they felt pressure to control their anger and emotions simultaneously from their home cultures on the one side, and from white, mainstream culture on the other. While each culture expected this behavior for different reasons, it resulted in the students feeling like they had to remain calm in the face of conflict. While they did not stay quiet, they all mentioned how it was part of their "education" to respond in a calm and smart way. They were not allowed to be as assertive and loud as other students, as will be explained in an example later in this chapter.

These are all examples of how the different expectations collide to create a complex, contradictory code of conduct that narrowly defines how Mexican, female students can exist in the educational pipeline and ultimately at The University of Texas at Austin. Urrieta writes that "Chicano/indigena identity is a produced identity that carries with it a deep sense of responsibility" (Urrieta Jr., 2009, p. 6). In the case of Mexican and Indigena women, they have responsibility over their supposed "out of control" hypersexuality, which is often taken to be the reason they may join gangs or misbehave (Chavez, 2008; Hyams, 2000). This is not a responsibility that Chicano men and white, female students necessarily have. This pushes Mexican women to exhibit a high degree of "control" that meets the expectations of schools, parents, or, if they are lucky, both.

Not all the students spoke out against teenage pregnancy or gangs. Some articulated their control and responsibility as them being very "independent:"

> It was a point of struggle, you know? Being away from home. I didn't know anybody here, anybody anywhere close, you know? The closest family was in El Paso (*laughs*). So it was hard, but everything went good and I'm glad and, you

> know, I did really… became really independent, *but I was already pretty independent*. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)
>
> I guess from an early age I told myself that school was going to be like the way I was going to like become independent, the way I was gonna make my life better. (Mary, Social Work)

Independence was held in high regard by all the students, who articulated how they have done so much on their own, such as learning about applying to college and figuring out how to get through university. The pervasiveness of the discourse of "independence" found in my study elucidates the importance the students gave to showing how in control they are of themselves as Mexican young women. They have been successful because of the way they have controlled (a) their sexuality, in that they have not become pregnant; and (b) their gender performance, in that they are nice and proper women, not argumentative or loud ones like cholas (Bettie, 2000). Abiding by an acceptable conduct ensures their academic success. However, being independent and the need to show independence can come at a great cost. When they first arrived at UT, the students had a hard time figuring out how to ask for help, as they had always built their identity as "independent" students. Amanda Lewis documented in *Race in the Schoolyard: Negotiating the color line in classrooms and communities* (2004) that there was a clear pattern among the Latina students she observed in different schools. In contrast to Black boys (who get a lot of attention for being "loud" or "out of control"), Latina students tend to stay under the radar. She writes, "Latinas expressed their alienation from school as silently as African American boys did loudly" (Lewis, 2004, p. 80). She was concerned over the destructive consequences of being ignored or not recognized. While Lewis agrees that the students were not failing and were liked by the teachers, their silence was interpreted as good behavior and they were left alone. She continues, "Latinas' silence went beyond good behavior to a particular kind of nonparticipation, a pattern that did not receive much attention because the girls were not interrupting or getting in anyone's way" (Lewis, 2004, p. 80). This illuminates a contradiction of the expected behavior of the girls who make it through the educational

pipeline: while it is expected that Latinas remain self-controlled because of society's anxieties over their raced gender and sexuality, this can also mean that they are not used to asking for help and are assumed to already know what to do.

Nevertheless, the students would problematize their independence by talking about how they had depended on others. Mary, for example, depended on her parents who reluctantly drove her to her community service and after-school activities. Blanca, an Art junior from Edinburg (a border town), also talked about how independent she was even though her school councilor had given her a lot of help. Therefore, it is not that they are doing it all by themselves (even though they say they are), but they are gathering resources and information that are just given to many white and middle class students. As Angie, a Government, Mexican American Studies and Indigenous Studies senior said:

> I feel like maybe in [the Government Department's advising], I've noticed that a lot of people who approach it are people who like, who come from like families of lawyers, or like doctors, people who are like, who have some kind of money. So they already kind of know, like, what their parents know. They already came to college or something. So they kind of have an idea, or like, but it's not as many like people who are like, lost like me? […] So like, I feel like it's a lot of students who already know what they're doing. So maybe the Government Department just expects everyone else to know what they're doing also? […] So it's like, sometimes professors are a little like, a little intimidating… Um, I don't know, maybe it's just because they're white and male (*we both laugh*). I know, for me it's sometimes like that because, oh ok, well, I'm gonna go talk to you–no just kidding! I don't know, maybe it's just that it's intimidating. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Similar to Angie, Mary and Natalia expressed how they felt that white and middle class students have it a lot easier because they already know what college is about, and it is even expected for them to go to university. They, on the other hand, had to figure out a lot of things by themselves. However, it was hard for them to ask for help sometimes, because as Angie said above, it can be intimidating to approach white professors and white students. Natalia had been excluded from study groups until she entered Bilingual Education, where she finally felt support from a critical mass of Mexican American students. She had previously found it hard to study with white students and ask white professors for help. Similarly, when Angie was having trouble being accepted into white

study groups, the professor matched her up with a white, female student. However, she felt more like she was being tutored than if she was in an equal study relationship. These are women who have shown that they are capable of being in AP classes and have shown how in "control" and independent they can be. Being judged by other students and professors, especially white students and professors, reinforces in them the need to show that they can do everything by themselves, which can be counterproductive.

Therefore, they had to be very careful who to ask for help if they were to maintain an image of independence, which was mainly for them to feel at ease and not judged. In Mary's case, she said she relied on her roommate for essential things such as finding housing, learning how school works, and talking about personal topics such as dating. She says of her roommate:

> I feel like I can always go to her and talk to her and like tell her anything without her being like, like, oh my god you're a bad person. You know, she's, she listens to things without judging. (Mary, Social Work)

Similarly, Natalia felt more at home with Mexican, female professors than she did with white male professors. While she explained that a bad experience her freshman year with a male anthropology professor really affected how she asked professors for help, she felt that Latina professors had approached her with a different attitude. A bilingual education assistant instructor, for example, would allow a space for all students to "check in" and speak about how they were doing that week. On another occasion, she was referred to an Educational Policy professor by the careers councilor. She explained that interacting with this professor changed her life, as she was the first Mexican American woman she had ever met in "such a high position" (Natalia). More on this will be explored in Chapter 3, but the relevancy here is in Natalia's feelings towards this professor:

> Seeing her in an office, in a university, that was like, amazing. Like, she kind of felt like a family member. Just, you now, from her accent, and just her attitude, it was so familiar. It was weird how, how it just felt familiar and nice. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

It was also easiest for the students to ask for help from other Mexican students, particularly people who came from their hometowns before or with them. They also reported relying on women more than men, including female best friends and roommates. Their image of "good student" was still maintained because they would seek help from others who knew what they were going through and thus would not judge them.

The hard work and creativity that all of them put into working hard in school, finding out information they didn't have, and troubleshooting is astounding. Still, the way they told me how they depended on others contradicted the way they told me how incredibly independent they were. While there is nothing wrong with being dependent on others or learning how to do things alone, but the contradiction elucidates the importance given to appearing "in control." They were healthily depending on the Mexican community at UT, and also received different types of support from their parents, school councilors, UT staff, and Mexican American professors at UT.

The people helping them, such as their parents, may not have recognized the university education the same way, and may not have agreed on the way to secure a future. This dissonance between their expectations and the students' expectations (informed by whitestream schooling) may have created the illusion that the students were doing this all by themselves. The discourse of "independence" in this case works against their relationship with their parents, and may even lead them to blame themselves when something goes wrong. As Mary said about not coming to UT right after high school:

> I was really angry, but I took all that anger and like, I—I took it upon myself I was like: "well, it's kind of your fault that you didn't leave because you didn't research enough." […] I started applying to UT without them knowing. Um, I had a job so I had enough for the application fees, and everything, I did everything on my own, and um, cause they didn't really, they really didn't want me to leave. (Mary, Social Work)

Instead of blaming a racist and sexist schooling system, Mary sometimes blamed herself or her family's expectations. Given that the students live in an ambivalent state informed by different ideologies, I could not take their words for granted. What seems to be happening is a conflation of the discourse of independence as self-control with the

liberal discourse of independence as being individualistic. The idea that they all became even "more independent" in college shows how they were still actively constructing an identity based on their control of their lives and situation. Fabiola, for example, said: "I've always been independent as well, but you know, I just feel like being here has improved that more." Because they saw UT and Austin to be so "liberal" and "progressive," the students were encouraged to be more independent. When this happened, the times that they actually saw collaboration and even dependence problematized their identities. Jessica, for example, talked about how she had relied on other Latinas and Latinos for internship and job opportunities. By networking with them, she had discovered that:

> And um, they knew each other because I guess they kinda have, they know a bunch of people that own businesses and restaurants, and just their little Hispanic culture. And I got my job through him, cause they wanted a… it's a chain [Mexican Restaurant] […] And it was just through them, you know? They have a bunch of friends who are like lawyers, and, you know? They're all Hispanic and they stick together. You know, I thought that was pretty amazing, you know, like educated people, you know? And they still rely on each other to do things. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

She found it amazing that post-college, these educated professionals were not "independent" necessarily, as they relied on each other. She also felt uncomfortable with a female, Mexican instructor giving her special projects during a class she took. Immediately after talking about an incident where a white, male student would make racist comments against her, she democratized discrimination and said:

> There's always, I think, some form of discrimination. Um, I don't think I felt it much though, at UT. I actually had a teacher who was Hispanic and I will say that I guess the white people can feel some discrimination there because she was just so happy that I was getting an education […] She ended up being my mentor and it was nice! (nervous laugh) You know, that you actually got something, like, something special, but you know, privileges for being Hispanic (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

These incidents were clear examples that the students were not as independent as they want to portray, and they problematize the liberal ideology of individualism and meritocracy. However, some of the students were not making the connection all the time

to the fact that white and middle-class students receive a lot of help from their parents, and they already know a lot more about college and careers. By not making this connection, Jessica feels troubled at best and guilty at worst because of the "special" help that her professor or other Hispanic professionals give to Mexican students.

Not all of the students I interviewed were troubled by the help they received from others, but they all made a significant effort to portray themselves as independent. Reflecting on the idea of *mestiza consciousness*, I observe that they took in what they could from the discourses of independence available to them and turned it into something that worked for them. While this discourse may have served to promote self-blame sometimes and help them fit into an imagined meritocracy at others, it also helped them create their own version of "independence" to recognize how, against all odds, they had succeeded in attending UT Austin. This recognition was necessary for their own psyche, since they had constantly been pulled from all directions along the educational pipelines and being "independent" was a way to speak back to the system and feel self-pride.

Nevertheless, I found it important to try to understand why this discourse could limit their identities at times. As mentioned above, Jessica felt guilt from "special treatment" that went against the liberal ideology that all students are the same. This guilt comes from the belief that all students have an equal opportunity in the education system. A history of denial of how race (Goldstone, 2006; Yosso, 2002a) and gender (Bennett deMarrais, 2000; Garrahy, 2003; Sadker & Zittleman, 2005) affect students' educational attainment accounts for students' beliefs that everyone is equal. This is a liberal ideology that, as bell hooks notes, is invested in immensely, particularly by white students and teachers. Nevertheless, most of the students in my project adopt this ideology because it is considered part of being an acceptable student at UT. Speaking against this ideology would shake the structure too much, which could risk them being seen as troublemakers. The trouble is that this results in the students believing that since everyone is the same, they should be respectful of the different experiences of others, effectively silencing them when they do notice inequalities. However, these experiences can be loaded with racial, class and gender privilege that can negatively impact the students by making them feel

responsible for feeling out of place or for not measuring up to white and middle class standards of education.

Still, as mestizas they cannot hold anything in rigidity. Gloria Anzaldúa explains that to be able to navigate between cultures and figured worlds, Chicanas cannot "hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). They must live with ambivalence to be able to pick up and drop discourses and ideologies as they continue to construct their identities. This meant that the students did not completely buy into liberal ideas of education, sameness and meritocracy. For example, Mary believed that minorities enter college at a huge disadvantage from white students because of segregation in Texas and the lack of support minority isolated schools receive. Natalia also blamed a lot of her troubles on a school that did not prepare her. Moreover, Angie mentioned that the district discriminated against her school, which was a majority minority school. Nevertheless, after hearing these and other instances of discrimination from the other students, Fabiola felt compelled to comment:

> You know, it's like, why shut something out when you're just trying to learn more about people? And you know, just welcoming change around you? And you know, it's something that being here, like I graduate in May, and nothing really shocks me anymore (*laughs*)… I mean, honest, after being here this whole time it's like, ok, like, what more, uh… if anything, you know, just smile and accept people for who they are because who do we have the right to judge? Like, none of us are perfect or anything. I think so. And it's definitely to not, you know, have those boundaries and just try to understand people and, you know, just be accepting of it because everyone demands that same amount of respect no matter what, so… (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Going back to a discourse that tries to silence students when speaking against inequality based on race, gender and class meant that she had to work hard at bending her reality. Fabiola mentioned that one time she felt really out of place as a Mexican woman in a programming class. She mentioned that this was a really impactful event for her because she had to drop the class, and the feeling has stuck with her throughout her entire career. Feeling marginalized because of gender (and to an extent her race) made her question herself:

> Really? Like, really feel, like, like, what do you, what are you doing? Or like, you know, like, this is just, I didn't feel right. But yeah, my dad helped me just get that out of my head. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Advice from her dad included:

> He's like, "Don't give up! I've been there and you'll hit your rock bottom but you have to get over it and, you know, keep seeing positive and keep pushing through." (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Fabiola mentioned that it has been her dad's support that helps her with her engineering career. Her father is an Electrical Engineer and shares many of his struggles, past and present, with her about how to survive in the world of white people. She is very proud of her family and of her culture, yet she admits that her mom calls her a "coconut" for being brown on the outside but thinking like a white woman on the inside. Using contract theory, Charles Mills (1999) writes that people of color enter a "racial contract" with white people where they will agree to misrecognize the world and bend their logic in return for opportunities and resources. The catch is that people of color do not get to enjoy all of their rights and must limit their subjectivity. Carol Pateman also writes that women have to abide by a "sexual contract" (Pateman, 1988), where women only serve as vehicles through which men can realize their full rights. All of the students in this project, to varying degrees, had to bend their reality to the logics of liberalism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy if they were to be awarded with opportunities.

However, this did not rule their identities. Even here, Fabiola uses a mestiza consciousness to straddle between two worlds: the world of the "Anglos," where you need to adopt a liberal mentality to feel accepted, and the world of her experience as a Mexican woman who does experience marginalization. As Anzaldúa writes, "*nosotros los* Chicanos straddle the borderlands. On the one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglos' incessant clamoring so that we forget our language" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 62). While she is referring to language here, this applies to the adoption of different ideologies and logics that Chicanas have to negotiate in order to be successful. In this case, Fabiola chooses to

bring forth a liberal ideology, though she never forgets her own "language" as evidenced by her questioning of the reasons she is in engineering. Anzaldúa also explains:

> In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79)

Keeping this in mind, it can be seen that the students do not blindly believe in liberal ideology, nor should they be judged on whether they should or not. I am instead focusing on why and how the adoption of liberal ideology becomes integral to the production of their identities as "good students" and "nice Mexican women," yet it also limits their subjectivity.

As I mention in my introduction, this liberal ideology teaches the students to be tolerant of others. However, while the discourse of tolerance is usually used to demarcate he/she who is to be tolerated and therefore falls outside the norm (Brown, 2006), the adoption of this discourse by the students in my project shows that they are applying it to everyone and not necessarily noticing that it is actually them who are the "different" ones, not the mainstream (white, middle class) students. There are exceptions, such as Angie noticing that she is treated differently based on her class, race and gender, but for the most part the other students apply the discourse of "tolerance" democratically. One big reason this happens is because all of the students believe that Austin is "the most liberal city in Texas." This leads them to assume that UT is a very liberal institution where "they're like open to anything here" (Fabiola), and must therefore be tolerant of others, including the people who try to marginalize them. For example, Blanca described a disturbing scene she witnesses around campus sometimes:

> I'll even like eavesdrop on other people's conversations that like other groups of people are doing as they're walking down the same like path, and they're just like "oh, and these Mexicans, and this and that," they're kind of like dissing it altogether, just the race altogether. "They're just stealing our jobs, and I don't know what," and, it just, it's really disturbing to like hear like just people saying, like, dissing like my ethnic group altogether. And like I don't say anything to them, because I want to be the better person. Pointing out something to them it's

> not really going to change their ways or how they think of things, or if not they'll enforce it […] "who are you to judge or say those things," or like "what do you know?" Obviously they're not as educated or what not. (Blanca, Art)

Here, it can be seen how two of the factors that shape the Mexican women's identities (that of being educated and that of being tolerant) come into play to produce the "nice Mexican woman" identity. Blanca feels outraged, yet she only has a few ways of showing it. She chooses to "take the high road" and showcase her educational superiority. Nevertheless, the students are making conscious choices about how to perform their identities as students and as Mexican women. Even the discourse of being "educated" and "tolerant" can have positive results for them, so it is not always a limit. Jessica, for example, talked about how she dealt with a problem at work by going to human resources and having them take action against a racist manager. She comments:

> I think we should answer to these problems, um, educated, you know? […] When my mom didn't know English they treated her like crap. You know, the services […] they look down on you, and um, it's just so much better when you know how the system works, when you know how to be educated, when you know they're treating you wrong, like she said (*points to another student*), keep calm, and show that you're not like, you're not gonna start screaming cause, they also say we scream a lot (*everyone laughs*). And so, you know, show the good side of it, you know? Just have manners and be respectful. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

In the middle of so many discourses and having a body that has the potential to scream "uneducated, loud, out-of-control, hypersexual" to the ears of mainstream students and faculty, the students in my project make the best decisions that work for them if they are to remain successful students. By having a flexible mestiza consciousness, they are able to turn the resources available to them into something that helps them move forward with their lives. While sometimes these discourses can serve to silence them and perpetuate systems of oppression, other times they are able to reach a position where they can achieve positive change. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, but as the example above shows, through Jessica's perseverance and good manners (something she said has been passed down from her grandmother and through her mother) she has been able to get a business degree, network with other Latina/o

professionals, and even have a racist white manager replaced at a job. No one can fault her for having chosen not to be loud and assertive like a white student, or rebellious like a chola. In the following section, I look at a case where the students have to make difficult decisions to resist oppressive discourses while successfully maintaining the very limited "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity.

UNFOLDING OF THE "GOOD STUDENT, NICE MEXICAN WOMAN" IDENTITY (A CASE)

One major example showcases how this complicated identity comes into play at UT Austin for the students in this project. It involved Mary in one of her social work classes. Like Mary's case there were other examples from every other student, where the limitations of the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity limited how they could feel and react to certain situations. The students were not completely blinded by this identity, but it had a strong influence on them.

Mary's story is interesting because she talks about the social work department as being very progressive because not only is it in UT Austin, but people who do social work are people who want to "help everyone." She also attributes this to the curriculum of many of her classes, which she believes teaches the students to be culturally "aware" and "competent." While she describes the program, the university and the city to be very "liberal" and "progressive," she also recognizes that the playing field is not equal for minorities. However, not everyone believes discrimination still exists. Mary said:

> We [the group of Mexican American friends in her social work cohort] have like a couple of white friends, but we're not really like friends-friends with the, with the white um, with some of our white classmates. Because they think that discrimination doesn't exist anymore. That um, "UT is super diverse. There's no reason for Hispanics or Blacks to feel left out." Like they still like, in that sense, I'm saying you're not really being culturally competent because you're only seeing your own culture […] Like, what your life is, you just, you don't even want to, to acknowledge that you have privilege, because you do. (Mary, Social Work)

This is what Mary *thinks*, but not necessarily what she *says* to them. Still, being able to articulate this analysis of why she does not get along with some white students is a tremendous feat in an educational climate that pushes her to not see race. It goes to

show how her experiences of marginalization because of her brown body can indeed create counter-stories to the dominant discourses (Cruz, 2001). Unfortunately, this knowledge needs to work in unison with the discourses of "tolerance" and "educacion" that guide the behavior of a "nice Mexican woman." Thus, in a case where a white, female student was practically yelling insensitive accusations to the Mexican students during one of their classes, Mary could not allow herself to express all of her anger. She says of this experience:

> I make sure that I don't internalize the negative thing that they say, like, I know myself, I know my culture, I know my people, and I make sure that I don't let it affect my view. Sometimes I get frustrated that I, um, I don't want to speak out. Just because I don't want to speak out of anger, like if I speak I want to make sure that it's to educate somebody, not tell them off. Cause to tell them off, it's not going to make anything better, but to speak to someone calmly and coolly, well that's gonna be different. (Mary, Social Work)

Mary wants to speak "coolly," because the "fiery Latina" has no space in educational spaces and Mary knows it. She has learned this from experience, as she said that being angry has never worked in the past for her. However, being limited to always being nice takes its toll on her, as it can be noticed from her language below:

> I sometimes do get frustrated because they have such an ignorant mentality and when you speak to somebody and they choose to be ignorant, well then that's their problem really, cause before, well he didn't know, well, now he knows, now she knows, now she just doesn't want to listen, now she's just being stubborn, so now it really is like her, like that's the problem, you know? (Mary, Social Work)

Mary was telling this story during the focus group discussion and she was obviously very upset by it, with the emotion bubbling to the surface before she could tell us why she was upset. Her discussion of students with privilege being ignorant was a common idea that they all took up when talking about racist and sexist students and professors at UT. In contrast, they were being "educated" and "tolerant." After all, wasn't this Austin, the city of tolerance? Nevertheless, liberal ideology was as much in play as was Mary's frustration. In fact, the white student that had offended her was not ignorant, but rather was using her white epistemology to "know" Mexican Americans through a lens of Latinidad, where she had a preconceived understanding of how Mexican

Americans fall short of her white and middle class standards. This was knowledge that was sanctioned by the professor, who did not interfere or support the Mexican students in the two debates that Mary describes below:

> And when we got to the topic of culture (*note: not race*), like the class got so heated, so, so heated, like it was, it was funny because it was all Hispanics like on this end, and all white people on that end, and, and one of the white girls, she still had like, she still said that we are not segregated, and we were like, "look around you, like, look at this formation! And we're not saying that it's like completely your problem, but we're saying that it's still an issue." And she's like "no, UT is so diverse like UT is so culturally competent, no discrimination happens, and now at UT." And we're like, "are you kidding me!?" (Mary, Social Work)

In this situation, the white student was adopting a liberal ideology where white students are so invested into believing that we are all equal and that everyone has the same opportunity, that it is very disturbing for her to believe otherwise (hooks, 1992). Liberal ideology would also prescribe that even talking about race could be a racist act in itself. While this student may have a genuine interest in "helping the world" as a social worker, she is denying any complicity in a white supremacist system that still silences minorities and still makes white concerns and values the center of attention (hooks, 1989, 2003a; Yosso et al., 2009). This is better elucidated by what happened next:

> And then, [the white students] were talking about child abuse and what we constituted as child abuse, and some of us, we grew up with our parents spanking us with a belt and to us that's normal. That's not necessarily child abuse if you don't leave bruises, it's not child abuse (*other students in the focus group laugh*). That's just being a parent. And a white woman goes: "oh, no, no, no! That's unacceptable. That's completely unacceptable. I can't believe people still do that, like, um, then those kids are gonna grow up and become like child abusers too." And I was like, "excuse you! I'm not a child abuser, my parents hit me with the belt, I'm not gonna, I probably won't hit my kid with the belt." You know? (Mary, Social Work)

The issue revolved also around dating minors, as Mary told me in the individual interview:

> And then, another [case study] was like, like this 18 year old was dating a 15 year old. And she was like: "Oh! That's disgusting! He's a pedophile! Like, ugh! Oh my goodness, like, I would never allow my daughter" and things like that. Like, "that's awful, awful! I can't believe parents let their children, like, ugh, child

> abuse! That child is getting abused!" Things like that, and I was like: "really?" Like, so she was just saying these things for the classroom without knowing that some of us, like, me, my mom was 14, my dad was 18 when they started dating. My dad's not a pedophile! Things were just different back then, you know? And then, they were actually 15 when my mom got married, and my dad was 19. Like, you can't just generalize like that. And that was very frustrating, and it had to do a lot with culture. A lot, a lot of it it's very cultural. (Mary, Social Work)

It is interesting to note that Mary did not use the word "race" in her discussions of segregation and the white students' attitudes towards the "cultural component" of the class. Tara Yosso argues that curriculum in educational spaces works against students of color and female students because it teaches knowledge that works to uphold white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (Yosso, 2002a). Social work is very much a part of the system, and is not a field where critical theories of race and gender will be taught because it is supposed to teach social service but not social change (Kivel, 2000). Thus, it could be said that Mary was working with what she knew from being a Mexican woman and from her passion for her culture and love of her family. Yosso argues that curriculum also extends to what the professor says, how he or she teaches the class, and what behavior is allowed or not allowed. The social work curriculum, including its teachings of "cultural competence" and the allowance of "culture" debates to get heated and be one sided, is a hostile curriculum that marginalizes the Mexican American students in that class. This is because it does not provide Mexican American students with a language to express what they experience, while the white students can turn on them and judge them against what they are learning in the class. Mary went on to express her frustration over what happened after all of these discussions took place:

> She was saying that and I was just looking down smiling the whole time, like everything she was saying. It—it was ridiculous. And she actually got mad, she's like, and I, actually a lot of my other, like the students, were also just like, like smiling! And I think it's because it gets to a point where it's like, like it's you're so stupid it's funny (*she laughs*). I'm like, um, "what are you saying?" It gets you like angry that you think that that person's mentality is so… (*laughs*) It's so ridiculous that, like, "I can't, I can't be angry at you right now, I'm just gonna smile and," you know, "because I know better," like, and so she's like, and I see all these people, and they're smiling, and I'm offended, and we were like "really you're offended?" (Mary, Social Work)

The professor and the other students did nothing to support Mary and the other Latina/o students. It is also hard to discern what was told and what was not, as when I asked for details Mary said a lot of these feelings and words were just bottled up. The fact that the white student was able to go on and on offending Mary and the other Mexican American students shows how relations of power work to censor Mary and limit how she can develop her identity in college. On top of that, the white student's racial privilege allowed her to manipulate reality so that she could act offended, something that hooks (2003) notes happens often. Mary's frustration and the vulnerability she felt because of the limiting "good student, nice Mexican woman" discourse can be understood by the way bell hooks talks about teaching about white supremacy:

> Simply talking about race, white supremacy, and racism can lead one to be typecast, excluded, placed lower on the food chain in the existing white-supremacist system. No wonder then that such talk can become an exercise in powerlessness because of the way it is filtered and mediated by those who hold the power to both control public speech (via editing, censorship, modes of representation, and interpretation). (hooks, 2003a, p. 27)

It is interesting how liberal ideology was picked up by the students by virtue of the city's reputation. It is even more interesting that this ideology fueled the white students in Mary's class, while at the same time limited Mary's identity formation by the way she was allowed to express herself. However, because of the mestiza consciousness, Mary can rework and change this ideology as she leaves and enters different figured worlds (such as the classrooms), and mixes it with her own experience as a brown woman. As Mary said when she got to UT:

> I feel like I've opened my mind a lot. You know? Like, I came here thinking that everything was black and white, and, you know, here I started seeing a lot of shades of grey. And just accepting that there, there are shades of gray. Like, so in a sense I feel like I belong more because I now have this very UT mentality of, you know, accepting people, not judging people. (Mary, Social Work)

This came into play when discussing more of her feelings on the issue with the white student. Mary commented:

> You have to I think take things case by case […] You can't really generalize. I've learned that you can't generalize, and she was generalizing, and that was very frustrating. (Mary, Social Work)

Her family experiences and her own experiences as a brown woman in a white, patriarchal world give her the insight to know that many things have to be taken into account when dealing with social work cases. This alone puts her ahead of the student who felt like she was so right that she had to yell to half a class of Mexican American students. On top of that, she told them that she did all this because she as a "strong (white) woman" who would not let herself be taken down. To this, Mary responded:

> Mary: In my view, my mom's a strong woman because my mom put up with a lot for me. For my sisters. Not saying that women should put up with things, but I'm saying that there's also strength in that. You can't see that as weakness and yours as strength.
>
> Juan: What do you think prevents them from seeing that?
>
> Mary: Because they have privilege that they don't make themselves aware of.

Being able to point to privilege is a great way to start disrupting the systems of oppression. Through this language, Mary can articulate why she feels frustrated and it is less likely that she will blame herself for not measuring up to the expectations of white students and faculty. Moreover, Mary was able to fall back on other Mexican American students (most of whom are women) to decompress and release her frustrations with them. She says:

> She said it out loud, and in our heads we were like, "you're offended? All this stuff you just said and you're offended? You offended us, and we have enough respect to keep calm and you're offended." We didn't, we didn't say anything, and we left the classroom. We were all so heated that we had a discussion like among ourselves. I had a discussion with my Hispanic friends, we're like "can you believe that woman?" Like, we really like took out our frustration and voiced our opinions among ourselves […] it's reassuring you're not the only one like experiencing this on your own. (Mary, Social Work)

The importance of having others to support you will be discussed in Chapter 3, but for now it is important to note that Mary at least had a support group from other

students like her. This is something that may not be available all the time, and if the students are not allowed to push the boundaries of the "good student, good Mexican woman" identity, they need to rely on others to be able to heal.

IN CONTRAST: WHITE WOMEN'S SUBJECTIVITIES

As it can be seen from my participants' experiences, female students' sense of subjectivity in college campuses is affected by their social position. As Mexican women in an institution that awards invisible privileges to males and white students, the women in my project feel like there are things they cannot do. While the white, female student in Mary's example can be loud, insensitive, disrespectful, and believe only her point of view counts, Mexican women are expected to perform a more passive femininity that is limited to accepting or rejecting the behavior of other students. Natalia also observed with sadness that other women can wear big earrings and colorful eye makeup, yet they will never be thought of as cholas. Along the lines of appearance, Fabiola said she has seen people dressed as hipsters, as preppy, and even in their pajamas in the classroom. However, when I asked her if she would ever do that, she responded in disbelief: "That's the one rule that I have that I will never break!" When I asked her why some women have the flexibility to do it, she responded: "It's probably a matter of personal choice. Like, they probably don't care how they look." To not care how you look is a luxury that only some students can afford, but not the students in this group. After attending UT Austin for a couple of years as a graduate student, I have observed how it is white women who get away with wearing less "proper" clothing, whether it is revealing clothing or their pajamas, to class and other formal settings.

Within the context of UT Austin, Mexican women's subjectivity and agency is exercised within the limiting "nice Mexican woman, good student" framework. As Chavez explains, "for Latinas, […] their lives as women, wives, and mothers are subject to redefinition by the larger society, which views them in comparison with more 'modern' white U.S. women" (Chavez, 2008, p. 74). Therefore, paying attention to what the white students (and sometimes male students) can do that the Mexican American

students in my study cannot also points to the factors that limit Mexican women's identity formation in college.

One interesting story directly related to Mexican women's identity construction in relation to white women revolved around white women's sexuality. Mary commented:

> I know that it's much more liberating, like the way they think, or like the way I would hear them talk like, I, um, just with the like their roles and like sexuality and everything, like it's—it's a lot more different I feel, than like the Mexican culture I was brought up in. Like, my mom used to always tell me that as soon as you had sex you were like not good anymore, like nobody was gonna want you, and… you know, like, it was different? When you hear like white women talk and they're like: "women have needs. Women have sexual needs." (*everyone starts laughing*) You're like: "what are you…? What are all these sexual needs that you are speaking of? Like, really? It's ok to have these desires?" Like, you know? Like it's different. At least for me I think. (Mary, Social Work)

Throughout this chapter, I have repeatedly talked about the anxieties surrounding Mexican women's sexuality and how this shapes their identity construction. In the example above, Mary notices that white women do not have to worry about the racial stigma attached to Mexican women's sexuality. In fact, there are discourses available for them to own their sexuality and Mary is in disbelief of this. Natalia is disturbed by the idea of talking about sexuality like white women do, and responded to Mary:

> You know to be honest I feel like I haven't really had that much exposure to like white American girls…(*they laugh*) No really, like… like, I mean my roommates they're white Americans but they're pretty like conservative and […] I'm not saying that the other people are bad! I'm—I'm just saying that they, they, they're like, just they keep to themselves and… just working, going to school, you know, they're not dating anybody, they're just, pretty chill […] I don't know why I haven't been exposed to that that much, like it just didn't happen. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

It's important to note that out of the group, Natalia seemed to be the most cautious and reserved, especially when it came to morals, sexuality and teen pregnancy. She converted to Islam because she felt it offered better morals than the ones she grew up with (as she perceived that too many Mexican girls were becoming pregnant too young), and she likes to associate with conservative people. This elucidates that a group of loud, outgoing, "liberated" white women would probably turn her off, because it challenges the

boundaries she assigns to sexuality and proper behavior; boundaries that helped her come to college.

In the example above, Mary attributes her views about sexuality to the Mexican culture she grew up with. However, Chavez (2008) and Hyams (2000) recognize that Mexican women have historically been constructed by white, middle-class culture as embodying deviant sexuality that is a threat to white identity and the nation. This is a move used to morally judge Mexican women and regulate their integration into society without disrupting white supremacy or heteropatriarchy. Mexican parents are aware of this, and they want what is best for their children when they try to push them into marriage or keep them from attending college and going "wild" (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Hyams, 2000; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, 2005). This is not to say that their parents' expectations do not also harm them. Any discourse that tries to control Mexican women's bodies is harmful, but unfortunately the students' criticism of gender roles only happened when talking about how "backward" or "uneducated" their parents were for their expectations. They did not notice how white, privileged spaces such as UT also have expectations that are bound to their sexuality as Mexican women.

Still, the discourse of white women's liberation did not go unchallenged. Upon hearing the story of how liberated white women are, Angie, who has awakened a more critical mind thanks to her Mexican American Studies and Indigenous Studies classes, responded:

> I heard like the white women and liberation, and like, I guess I really haven't seen that with my experience at UT […] Sometimes like people see white women as like being liberated in a certain way. But however, like sometimes because we come from our culture, like we don't realize that like our mothers, like our grandmother, like cooking and like doing all this stuff is, in a way, like they're liberating themselves […] [And as an indigenous woman] I need to discover this and like it's not just like looking up to white women, but looking up to my culture. And like being able to reclaim it. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

The students reflected on what Angie said during the focus group discussion. During individual interviews, the students had more positive things to say about their

mothers, which were also informed by Mexican American Studies classes or their own experiences. This shows how the mestiza consciousness cannot abide just by one discourse and must take into account everything it can to make sense of the world. Still, their discussion of what white women can do about their sexuality, in combination with the example of Mary's social work class with the white, female student who felt entitled to yell at the Mexican American students, elucidates one final force that shapes the contours of the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity. This is discussed in the following section.

THE COLONIAL LEGACY OF TEXAS (STILL) POLICING MEXICAN WOMEN'S BODIES

One key difference in the way white women can construct their identities in comparison to Mexican women is: (a) their "subject status" (as explained in the introduction of this chapter), which allows them to challenge their traditional sexuality; and (b) the protection they enjoy of their bodies as women with normative sexuality. Mexican women have a harder time defining their own sexuality because they continue to have a colonial relationship with white America, which has a unique history in Texas. Rosa Linda Fregoso argues that Latinas have historically been constructed as colonized objects in contrast to the "modern" image of white women. She writes:

> This model of a modern "new woman" is not the dominant image of Mexican femininity lodged in cultural memory; it is not the image of Mexican female identity that circulated in public discourses, either in Mexico, where the dominant feminine ideal was calcified in self-sacrificing motherhood, or in the United States, with its colonialist investment in an image of premodern Mexican primitivism. (Fregoso, 2007, p. 55)

To explain the colonial relationship, I draw from Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies* to recognize it as: (a) the subjugation of the bodies of the Other for economic expansion, but with an ultimate goal of domination because of alleged racial superiority and "destiny;" and (b) colonization as a system of knowledge that is imposed on others for epistemic domination as well. All of these can be realized in a university space, which is organized by white supremacy, a political ideology that marginalizes my participants and organizes space based on a racial hierarchy that

subjugates bodies of color, which is a legacy of the European conquest of America (Mills, 1999; L. T. Smith, 1999). There is a colonizing discourse in the university that makes Latinas' bodies hypervisible through the demarcation of deviant sexuality (Castaneda, 1993; Collins, 2004; A. Smith, 2005), while simultaneously ignoring their presence and erasing their experiences and identities by focusing on a white-centric curriculum. The latter is realized because, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, universities legitimize only Western epistemologies, serving as a bastion of "civilization," and participating in the struggle of "what counts as knowledge, as language, as literature, as curriculum and as the role of intellectuals" (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 65). This process in the university is explored more in the next chapter. In this section, I focus on how the legacy of colonialism still helps shape the identities of Mexican women by policing their bodies through gender violence based on marking their bodies as always inherently deviant (A. Smith, 2005).

Given the mixed heritage of the women in my study, and given that they were all brown-skinned women, they carry with them a history of colonialism that is still ongoing (L. T. Smith, 1999). Texas is a space historically constructed as conquered first by Spaniards, who subjugated the indigenous peoples, and then by white Americans, who subjugated the Mexicans, mestizas/os[5] and the indigenous peoples (among other racial Others). Gloria Anzaldúa theorized her relationship to Mexican culture and Anglo (white) culture as doubly colonized. She wrote: "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 17). She recognizes her history as a Chicana woman in Texas as being shaped by white America's takeover of the Texas territory from Mexico, which was itself a colonial project the Spaniards and other European groups had inflicted on the Native Americans. This history of domination shapes the views white students and faculty can have of Mexican women (especially dark Mexican women) as subjugated people in white territory (Castaneda, 1993).

[5] People of mixed race ancestry

For example, Myra Mendible writes that "the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848) produced political allegories that made their way into popular 'story papers' and dime fiction," where "the Mexican woman (and, by extension, Mexico itself) figured in numerous imperial romances and sensational novels" (Mendible, 2007, p. 8). In these relationships, white America's conquest of the Southwest was justified through the romantic conquest of white men over Mexican women. This trope was maintained through the twentieth century in the form of silent film, as Myra Mendible writes:

> Much of the silent film era's mediation of Latin American identity, for example, reflected the residual hostilities resulting from territorial disputes and clashes with Mexico. As the pretty señorita anxious to give herself (and her territory) to the Anglo male or as the hypersexed and treacherous foil to the virtuous Anglo heroine, the Latina body figured prominently in cinematic depictions of U.S. nation building. Film images translated nationalist fantasies and power relations into iconographic and ethnographic shorthand. As signifier, the Latina's erotic sexuality served to affirm the desirability of the Anglo male and, by extension, his national superiority; it also served as moral foil to her more principled feminine counterpart, the wholesome "all-American gal." (Mendible, 2007, p. 9)

The trop survived into the twenty first century, as Erica Chico Childs writes that in current, popular films "white masculinity is reaffirmed through the retelling of conquests of other cultures, which can be symbolized through the conquest of women of that culture" (Childs, 2009, p. 71). This symbolic colonial relationship can be see in the anxieties and distress my research participants expressed over media stereotypes of Latinas. For example, Mary had a critique of the media surrounding Latina sexuality:

> Um, it also bothers me whenever they paint, you know, they either make us very submissive and like working for them, or they make us very sexual and super bombshell like, hot, and things like that, you know? And we're just so promiscuous, you know? We wanna, want to have sex with this white character. You know? We want, we want him, and that *really* bothers me (*saying all of this in a very melancholic voice*). Because, (*she laughs*) I'm Mexican and I'm not a bombshell. I'm so far from it and um, it's just too oversexified (sic) like that. I feel like it then gives people these stereotypes that they think that we have the music in us, and you know, like, we're just like very party animals and things like that, and that's not who we are. That's not, you know? Who we, that's not who we consist of. Like, we're more than music, more than sex, things like that. (Mary, Social Work)

While most of them denied being affected by their race and gender in the university when I asked them general questions, they were able to fully express their anguish over media stereotypes of Latinas, as seen above. In another example, Jessica talked about how she dislikes Latinas' stereotype as hypersexual in the media:

> We usually take the crappy jobs, the waitresses are slutty, you know… That's another thing that's usually portrayed with a Mexican woman. Prostitution, if you see a prostitute, its rarely where you see a white one, it's normally Latina. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

The "crappy jobs" and the "slutty" image are legacies of colonialism. As Mendible states: "these gender metaphors both transmitted and shaped discourses of American nationality and imperialist expansion" (Mendible, 2007, p. 9) because constructing Mexican women as existing outside of traditional views of white femininity, their bodies and by extension their territory becomes "up for grabs." Molina Guzman engages with the media's role in maintaining this relationship when she writes:

> Symbolic colonization depends on media storytelling practices that reaffirm dominant norms, values, and beliefs about Latinidad. Film, television, and news stories grounded in the practices of symbolic colonization produce a homogenizing construction of Latinidad, therefore reinforcing the border between the nation as white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant and its marginalized subjects as ethnic and racial others. (Molina-Guzman, 2010, p. 153)

In addition, and as mentioned in my Introduction, U.S. society has historically been shaped by demarcating women of color as inherently deviant as a way to justify their conquest (A. Smith, 2005). The efforts of the students in my project to overcome stigmas related to their sexuality and their expectation to only work as low-wage laborers is a reflection of this colonial force. Fabiola, for example, expressed:

> Just going along with the whole thing about stereotypes of like the maid, the cook, you know? Just doing the lawn work, like those kinds of things. Cause, I've seen it like where I live, they're really quick to judge too. They'll have like people who do the yard work and I've seen the way they treat them. Just like without care, or […] just not really with any respect. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Mary, Jessica and Fabiola raised two of the most hated stereotypes of Latinas among the group: their alleged hypersexuality and their subjugated status in society. However, the subjugated status of Mexican women always comes back to their sexuality. Given the students' lament over Latinas being either sexually available or available for labor exploitation, I see the awareness of and fear over Latina stereotypes as evidence of an ongoing colonial relationship between white Americans and Latinas. Because the students in this project also expressed distress over Latina stereotypes of the "bombshell" (Mary) and the "slut" (Jessica), I recognize judgments on their bodies as a form of sexual/gender violence. As Andrea Smith writes, "Gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism. That is, colonial relationships are themselves gendered and sexualized" (A. Smith, 2005, p. 1).

As minorities in a white and male centric space, the students in this project are vulnerable to the way they have historically been positioned as outside of legitimate understandings of white femininity and personhood. This makes white women's sexuality the bar against which they must compare themselves and ultimately fail, which identifies their Othered bodies as "fair game" for exploitation, whether this be labor or other forms of domination (Castaneda, 1993). Ironically, white women themselves are allowed to break away from a more conservative view of sexuality, while Mexican women must still control their alleged hypersexuality and hyperfertility (Chavez, 2008). Their racial and gender identities mark them as inherently deviant and not worthy of the same rights as white women. As Castaneda writes, "A woman (women) thus devalued may not lay claim to the rights and protections the society affords to the woman who does have sociopolitical and sexual value" (Castaneda, 1993, p. 27-28). As explained at the beginning of this chapter, because white women are constructed as embodying normal sexuality and subjectivity in opposition to Mexican women's abhorrent sexuality, it is them who are then valued and deserve protection. Other Mexican American women have written about this relationship, showing that it is not unique to my research participants. As Cristina Tzintzun writes in *Colonize This!*, she worries about dating white men:

> Even though my skin is white like theirs, they will try and colonize me […] I see what a white man did to my beautiful, brown, Mexican mother. He colonized her. It is not love that drew my father to my mother, as I used to think; rather, it was the color of her skin, her impoverished background, her lack of education, her nationality, her low self-esteem, her submissiveness. In his mind these qualities reinforced his superiority. Instead of recognizing the differences between him and her as beauty, my father saw them as a means for exploitation. (Cristina Tzintzun, 2002, p. 17)

Finally, the gendered nature of the way Mexican American women are policed through expectations surrounding their sexuality can be explained as colonial because of the way they safeguard their bodies. One of the students talked about a limitation she has for being a woman of color that men of color do not have to think about. Angie, who has a social justice mindset as a student, talked about joining and working with a women's organization because she felt she could not participate in the ISO (International Socialist Organization) the way men wanted her to:

> Not to call ISO irrational, but a lot of like socialists, they're more like radical. Like "we're gonna do this, we're gonna go protest, Wells Fargo or something like that." And I'm like, "no, that's not how you get done." Or like "we're gonna go get arrested at the tower..." Which is cool but it's not what I wanna do. Like, that's not how I want to make change […] like "no, I can't get arrested." Or "no, I'm not gonna get arrested, I'm a female." Like, having a male cop just like pat me down or whatever is not something I want to go through. Like sometimes it's hard for [males] to understand. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

As Andrea Smith (2005) writes, certain bodies, particularly indigenous women's bodies, have historically been constructed as "inherently rapable" (A. Smith, 2005). Thinking that a male police officer would assault her is not a far fetched idea, as women of color's bodies have been constructed as "available" in the popular mainstream imagination (Childs, 2009; Mendible, 2007; Molina-Guzman, 2010; Valdivia, 2010). Therefore, it can be seen that safeguarding the body is not just a practice to build an identity acceptable to whitestream schooling, but also a practice of self-preservation. In other words, Mexican American women's identity construction in college is not just

limited by modern, white-centric, liberal ideas of education, but also through a history of sexual violence against women of color in the U.S.

Universities are historically male dominated institutions where knowledge is created to uphold white supremacy (hooks, 1989, 2003a; A. Smith, 2005; L. T. Smith, 1999; Yosso, 2002a; Yosso et al., 2009). If indeed women of color are to negotiate a space in them (Puwar, 2004), they must do so keeping in mind the vulnerability of their bodies (Chavez, 2008; Cruz, 2001). The self-policing that the women in my study do around their sexuality, then, is not just a simple adherence to a code of conduct in relation to white and middle-class values. This identity of "good women" has deeper roots that are shaped by the legacy of colonialism in Texas and the Americas in general. I do not expand more on how colonialism shapes my students because my intention is to highlight other reasons for the policing of Mexican women's bodies and sexuality, not to study colonialism in depth. However, I do bring this to light because, as a mestizo (of Spanish and Pipil[6] heritage), I consider myself a colonized person and I find it imperative to show, even in a brief section, how colonialism is still an ongoing project that affects the lives of those who have indigenous ancestry in this country.

DISCUSSION CHAPTER 1

My research participants built their identities as Mexican, female students around the idea of having made the "right" choices. They are not pregnant, they were in AP classes, they avoided the "wrong" kind of people, and they were tolerant of others. They were also able to attend college and figure out how the university works with very few resources. So what ensured their success? Academic success for the students was bound an appropriate code of conduct unique to my participants' gender and race/ethnicity. Specifically, the students have to prove that they can keep their alleged "hypersexuality" and its deriving behavior "under control." In other words, they had to take care to construct an identity as "good students" and as "nice Mexican women" simultaneously. They cannot be considered "good students" if they are not also "nice Mexican women."

[6] Amerindians from Kozkatlan, where modern-day San Salvador is built

They also needed to satisfy expectations set by the mainstream American culture while also balancing the expectations set by their parents. Sometimes, the expectations can have the same names, but mean something completely different. Both their parents and the university, for example, want them to be "educated." In different Mexican cultures, though, this means having respect and being "tolerant." This tolerance conflates with the liberal discourse of tolerance that compels the students to censor themselves around people. Moreover, they are given different messages surrounding their "our of control" sexuality, which is shaped by a legacy of colonialism, media stereotypes, white anxieties over Mexican American reproduction, and more. Trying to make sense of all of these discourses is quite a mental balancing act uniquely expected from Mexican women, and is achieved by embodying a mestiza consciousness.

The mestiza consciousness allowed them to keep their humanity in a system that seeks to render their race, class and gender as nonexistent. Still, the code of conduct for the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity involved: (a) identifying and rejecting the pathology of Mexican culture; (b) showing that they have self-control over their hypersexuality and hyperfertility; (c) showing that they have control over their emotions and are not "fiery;" and (d) showing that they believe in liberal ideology such as meritocracy and color-blindness. While the students adopted many of these discourses in order to be rewarded with an opportunity to get through the educational pipeline, they did not just "take it." They were not openly rebellious like the cholas, but their love for their family and their own experiences as women who were excluded from fully participating in society informed the ways in which they could rework the resources available to them and change their situation.

Moreover, the identity they needed to construct to survive in college did not really allow for them to speak against the oppressive forces as much as they wished they could, resulting in tremendous frustration. They were nevertheless able to affirm their Mexican identities through taking different stances on issues that confronted them. For example, Mary was able to find ways to respond to the student who pathologized Mexican culture in her class, Jessica was able to have a racist manager replaced at work, and Natalia

searched for a Mexican, female professor to serve as a role model. Still, working with dominant discourses came at the cost of censoring them and damaging them emotionally. As Delgado Bernal writes, “certainly, in a society that emphasizes assimilation these individual and subtle acts can be viewed as a form of resistance” (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 632). These resistances will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 3.

Differing somewhat from Delgado Bernal, I am proposing that my research participants have used a *mestiza consciousness* as the *primary* way “by which they have navigated their way around educational obstacles and into college” (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 623). Moreover, by recognizing them as embodying a mestiza consciousness, I also acknowledge that the students still exist in a colonial relationship with white supremacy and heteropatriarchy that helps shape their identity. Myra Mendible writes:

> The Latina body has signaled a permeable racial and national border, a field of diverse oppositions between rationality and sensuality, culture and nature, domestic and foreign. This body metaphor has informed America's defining myths, providing basic themes and motifs for a variety of cultural narratives. Specifically, it has served to justify U.S. corporate exploitation of Latin American labor and resources, invasions and border violations, and the "internal colonization" of U.S. Latino groups. (Mendible, 2007, p. 8)

As Anzaldúa herself asks, when talking about the mestiza, “just what did she inherit from her ancestors? This weight on her back – which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, which the baggage from the Anglo?” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 82). She recognized that she not only carried the burden of the colonized, but also the burden of adopting ideologies of domination from her colonizer. From their Indian mother, the students inherited brown skin and a “Mexican body” that is read as inherently deviant. From the Spanish/Mexican roots, they inherited a more recent form of subjugation in the form of colonialism perpetrated by Anglos in Texas. As future professionals adopting liberal, white-centric ideologies, the Mexican women in my project sometimes adopted what Angela Davis fears is promised to them by liberal ideology: an “equal opportunity to participate in the machinery of oppression” (Davis, 2005, p. 29).

The mestiza consciousness is the battleground for the students to negotiate all the discourses around them and emerge as successful students in one way or another. Combining the discourses they heard from their parents, the discourses they pick up from the university, and their own experiences was a way for them to strategically position themselves within the university. There may be many things I missed in my analysis of how the students in my project build their identities. Many of the participants expressed anxieties over escaping the fate of their peers back at home who become pregnant, drop out of university (if they even go in the first place), or become involved with the wrong crowd. This is articulated in many cases as having been their "bad choice":

> We all had the same opportunity in the end, but it's a matter of what you do with your time and if you really have that will power to you know, go out there and change something. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

My position as a man and as an international student masks many of the realities that they go through. Nevertheless, there were some questions that I could raise that the students themselves may take for granted. I do not have enough information to answer these fully, and I have addressed some in this chapter, but future research could address these questions: (a) why do the students have such a strong critique of gender in Mexican culture, but cannot make that critique of gender in white/ mainstream culture? How is the K-12 school system complicit in a system that censors and erases Mexican girls' identities? If the cholas and other students who stand in opposition to the system do not make it to the university, what are some ways in which the "nice Mexican women" can create structural change? What are some ways that students like my research participants can reach out and learn from cholas and mothering teens?

Chapter 2: "Whoa! Where all my brown people at?!": Regulating The Brown Body Into The University Space

> [Coming to Austin] was also the first time I felt like a Mexican really (*students laugh*). (Mary, Social Work)

> But he told me: "I can just see it in you. Like, chances are you're gonna transfer to the business school. Like, I see you doing that engineering thing for like one or two years and be like, no screw this." […] I've heard it so many times and I still stuck to my gut and stayed in engineering school. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Why did Mary have to feel like a Mexican woman for the first time in Austin? Why did people tell Fabiola to her face that she could not possibly do engineering? Who or what questioned their gender and racial position? As discussed in Chapter 1, there are many discourses and social forces that help shape Mexican women's identities in college. These forces judge Mexican women's bodies as "out of control" and fear their fertility, and include expectations from parents, stereotypes of Mexican women in white culture, a legacy of colonialism, and more. However, even if they conform to these forces, the truth is that they are trespassers in a college where they do not have an "indisputable right" to be in (Puwar, 2004). As Mexican women, they embody excess sexuality and excess difference in the eyes of mainstream, white, middle class students, faculty and staff (Chavez, 2008; Mendible, 2007; Molina-Guzman, 2010). As Cindy Cruz says, "nothing provokes the custodians of normality and objectivity more than the excessiveness of a body" (Cruz, 2001, p. 659). Thus, the students have to deal with a campus racial and gender climate that is at best hostile to them, at worst extremely offensive and invalidating (Sanday, 2006; Yosso et al., 2009). In this climate, students, professors and other people around Austin will try to regulate how the students integrate into the university and some will find ways to remind them of their place in society as Mexican women. Many of these people are not trying to be offensive, but are simply not recognizing how their actions, the structure of the university and the liberalism of Austin support a white supremacist, heteropatriarchal system (hooks, 1989, 2003a; A. Smith, 2006; L. T. Smith, 1999).

The way that the students in my project are "put in their place" is through microaggressions. These are nuanced interactions and messages that highlight the gender and racial deviance and inferiority of the Mexican, female students when compared to white, middle class standards. Microaggressions follow mainstream and liberal logics so neatly that it is hard to pinpoint them as racism, sexism or other forms of oppression. After all, liberals believe that they have figured out how to solve racism and sexism: do not notice it, do not talk about it (hooks, 1992). Tara Yosso's (2009) article *Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates* supports one of my own assumptions, which is that "de facto segregation in K-12 schooling further exacerbates the disproportionate underrepresentation of Latina/o undergraduates and shapes what may be the first opportunity for academic interaction between Latinas/os and Whites" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 660). This can result in a clash, or as the students in my project worded it, "culture shock," which translates to Mexican American women experiencing "ongoing racialized and gendered incidents questioning their academic merit, cultural knowledge, and physical presence" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 659).

Most microaggressions have a focus on either making the Latina body hypervisible due to its alleged excesses, or make their bodies invisible on campus through the use of a white-centric curriculum, language and attitude that denies them their experiences. Focusing on the way microaggressions make my participants' bodies hypervisible or invisible "traces the contours of the Latina body in the interstices where lived reality and public fantasies converge" (Mendible, 2007, p. 5). It also traces the limits of the "good student, nice Mexican woman identity." The participants in my study were, on several instances, (mis)recognized in college by white students and faculty because their bodies, accents, and actions were read through a lens of Latinidad. This lens prescribes a set of shared understandings about what Latina bodies should be (Mendible, 2007). At other times, the professors would not take into account the presence of my participants in their classes, resulting in an erasure of their racial and gender difference and therefore a marginalizing educational experience for my participants.

Either way, microaggressions have a function of regulating the integration of the Mexican American women in my study. They also serve to show the students how others are actively assigning meaning to their bodies, constructing barriers around the way they can construct their own identities. I organized the microaggressions that my research participants experienced into four different camps: (1) the first has to do with the way the curriculum used in some classes marginalizes the students; (2) second, I look at interactions and scenes around the university that make the students feel out of place; (3) third, I list insults that are related to Latina hypersexuality, the invisibility of indigenous peoples, immigration, class and clothing, and language; (4) finally, I look at Fabiola's case specifically to see how her gender takes the front seat as a marker of difference in the engineering school, even though gender difference is made to be invisible at UT.

MICROAGGRESSIONS BASED ON CURRICULUM: MAKING THE OTHER INVISIBLE

For this section, I begin by briefly revisiting the example of Mary's social work class from Chapter 1. As stated above, one way that Mexican American students can feel marginalized is through the professors' curriculum. Yosso defines curriculum as the structures in place that allow specific classes to present specific knowledge (Yosso, 2002a). This includes the materials that are taught and the manner the professor teaches the class. In Mary's case, the professor taught "cultural competence," a common concept in social work. However, this body of knowledge does not contain language or knowledge necessary to change social structures, but rather teaches students to be sensitive enough to work with minorities within current structures (Kivel, 2000; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). When the Mexican American students challenged the case studies being presented after white students started insinuating that they were potential child abusers or molesters, the white students used their social positioning to censor and marginalize the Mexican American students. Mary did not have all the language to combat these accusations, which most classes do not provide. Moreover, judging from what Mary told me, the debate went on until the Mexican students left the class and had their own discussion. No mention of the professor was made, and the way it

ended seemed as though the white students had "won" and the Mexican American students retrieved to heal. The way the curriculum was set up (the lesson and the debate) served only to distress the Mexican American students, with little evidence that anyone learned anything except a lesson in powerlessness (hooks, 2003a). While no one thought that the white students and the professor had a main goal of offending and marginalizing the students, they were being offensive, deliberately or not, by prioritizing a body of knowledge that assuages racial and class guilt (Kivel, 2000). They were also prioritizing the liberal logic of "we should all just get along" and censoring all differences (hooks, 2003a). Drawing from Grillo & Wildman (1995), Yosso writes that "this pattern of prioritizing the needs of White students occurs 'often with a complete lack of self-consciousness' because 'white supremacy creates in Whites the expectation that issues of concern to them will be central in every discourse'" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 665).

Presenting knowledge that only serves to recognize the white, middle-class (often male) experience is one way to also maintain a colonial relationship with Mexican American women, as explained in Chapter 1. Moreover, if this knowledge only shows the Other through a Western gaze, Yosso explains that students may feel marginalized and disenfranchised in class. She writes that professors often have

> one curriculum unit for an entire year […] dedicated to African American or Native American histories, and even within these units, the perspective is often told from how Whites encountered these "other" people, which re-centers discussions about race back to the "standard," White middle class. (Yosso, 2002a, p. 94)

This was evidenced by the experiences of the students in my project. Angie shared many stories revolving around feelings of marginalization in the government department, which she identifies as consisting mostly of white and mostly middle- and upper-class students. The professors were also apparently middle- to upper-class, exhibiting behavior that really offended and hurt her. One professor in particular made her feel very uncomfortable. This was a course on Latin American law:

> We were going over the courts, and uh, I guess the whole judicial system in Latin America […] So he was introducing like how the court affected the indigenous people in Latin America. So the first day, to introduce it he showed a video of like

> 2 boys who had, I guess, they had stolen something, so the video showed, I guess, the indigenous community whipping kids. […] So I personally felt uncomfortable, because as presenting this to a Western American view, it shows them as very savage. And even my classmates present, when they were presented with that information, they were like: "why are they hitting them? Why can't they just go to jail?" Or like, "Why can't they, why do they have to like, go straight to force?" […] So, I think that was one of the uncomfortableness about it. I tried talking to my professor about it, but I think that he wasn't very open to like hear about it. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Angie, a woman who identifies as Indigena, was very offended by this film. It showed a very colonizing gaze of native peoples of South America, and her classmates reacted by pathologizing their entire culture. After the film ended, the professor asked if there were any questions. Angie's hand was up for a few minutes, but the professor did not acknowledge her. At the end of the semester, Angie wrote in the evaluation sheets that she had felt uncomfortable with that section of the class. A day later, the professor wrote to the entire class saying:

> "Please, students, everyone, can you fill out the evaluation form? I take these opinions very seriously and if one person says something, um, and the rest decide not to say anything about them, I'm gonna have to like go off of what this person is saying." So I'm not sure if he was referring to me. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Was the professor trying to find someone who had the opposite opinion of Angie? That cannot be said for certain. What can be noted is that the professor never addressed Angie's concern directly and never apologized for incorporating a video that she had told him was offensive to her in his curriculum. Angie felt marginalized and ignored, reinforcing the notion that Andrea Smith argues is white supremacy's efforts to make all indigenous peoples disappear (A. Smith, 2005), and what Linda Tuhiwai Smith says is Western academia's colonizing practices of arranging and presenting knowledge about the Other solely under a Western view (L. T. Smith, 1999). In this case, attention was taken away from Angie's body, making her feel invisible and invalidated.

Another professor affected her in both the contents of the class and the way he taught it. This was a class concerning Eurocentric legal cases in the United States and

Britain, so already Angie felt alienated from the contents of the class. She was unfamiliar with the language, and the professor did nothing to bring students who were not familiar with Eurocentric concepts up to speed with the rest of the class. According to her, it was as though he expected people to already know the vocabulary, the places and the logics behind these texts, something that, as Angie explained, students whose parents were lawyers attended college may know. When Angie approached him with concern over her grade and inquired if she should drop the class, the professor responded:

> He said something like: "well, Angie, it's your fault that you're not succeeding." […] He wasn't helpful. He was just like: "well it's your fault, you had the resources, if you don't want to succeed in my class [it's your fault]." (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

The professor in that class adopted a very liberal mentality that assumed all students were the same and had the same opportunity to succeed. He did not take into account that Angie was taking fifteen credit hours and working to have financial security in college. He placed all responsibility on her, when as a Mexican woman she already has extra responsibilities to keep her differences "under control," maintain a balance between different worlds, and in this class come up to speed with students whose privilege give them an edge. However, what made Angie feel the most uncomfortable in this class were his comments and his relationship to (mostly white) fraternity and sorority students:

> He would come to class and say things like: "Um, how was your weekend? Like, for my weekend," from his perspective he would say, "for my weekend, I went to the golf club, and I'm the poorest, richest person in my golf club." Like, and I'm just like, like why are you saying things like these? Like, so it made me feel really uncomfortable, like, "ok well, I guess…" And it seemed like I was the only one who like was having like a problem, or issue, with it. Because, looking around, especially in that class I can tell all my classmates, majority of them were white, or like, even by the way they dress. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Angie felt alienated because of his flaunting of class privilege, which accentuated the racial privilege of her classmates who could relate to the professor. The students would branch off into cliques mostly composed of fraternity and sorority students. The professor would also encourage these cliques, and Angie felt extremely excluded, since

she could never be part of that group for racial and economic reasons. It affected her studying as well, because study groups would deliberately form in a segregated fashion, and she felt that the students would go out of their way to not interact with her. While from a Western point of view her sense of alienation could be trivialized, Angie had expressed before how she was discriminated against in terms of race and class in Houston while she attended high school. Gloria Anzaldúa writes that Chicanas develop a sixth sense that she calls *la facultad* (Anzaldúa, 1987). This is a sensitivity to detect the subtle and not so subtle acts of oppression against her. Angie, having developed a critical mind through Chicana and Indigenous epistemologies, knew what she felt. Taking into account that she came from a poor high school, has a very dark complexion and identifies as Indigena, it is not far fetched to think that the elite, white, fraternity and sorority students would have trouble integrating her into the group and could even exclude her. In addition, the professor enabled the students to be that way and designed a class that would only be readily available to middle-class students. Both aspects of his curriculum were white centric and middle-class centric, creating a hostile environment for Angie that made her experience invisible to the rest of the class.

Angie's story did not stop there, as she mentioned that the professor also expressed further invalidation:

> He said, um, "do you guys know what the most oppressed group right now is?" And he got like different answers. Some people were like "women, blah, blah, blah." And then he's like, "No. It's men. Men are the most oppressed group here, and, in UT and in the United States. It's because women are coming up and they are talking about being oppressed, but they're really oppressing men." (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

First, that is not a question that should ever be asked because it is divisive and results in "oppression Olympics" (A. Smith, 2006). Second, for him to answer that men (and he probably meant white men, given his Eurocentric approach to curriculum and pedagogy) were the most oppressed group and have an argument for it would make all women feel uncomfortable. In a campus where the Center for Women's and Gender Studies and the ethnic studies programs are receiving less support each year, his words

carry tremendous impact. The end result was Angie dropping this class. As someone who aspires to go to law school, this could have been a very useful class for her if it hadn't been for all the microaggressions from the professor and the students. Ultimately, the danger of microaggressions includes students' psychological and physical health and their exclusion from education opportunities because they are pushed out of programs (Yosso et al., 2009).

CAMPUS RACIAL CLIMATE: HOW A WHITE-CENTRIC CULTURE DIVIDES AND CONQUERS

The alienation the students may feel is not limited to classrooms. The university environment itself can contribute towards feelings of alienation, isolation, and shame about Mexican culture. These feelings can also point to the boundaries of the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity. Part of this isolation comes from being a minority in the university. With only 17.6%[7] of the student population being Hispanic, finding a familiar face can be difficult. As Mary writes:

> I was never aware that I was a minority until I came here. I was like, "Whoa! Where all my brown people at?" (*All of them laugh; someone says, "Yeah, I'll agree with that!"*) […] In Mexico they always regarded me as American […] then coming here I started noticing that there isn't that many Mexican Americans. (Mary, Social Work)

Mary found it interesting that, living on the border, her English and other aspects of her identity would make people in Mexico consider her an American. She also thought of herself as being American. However, when she came to Austin, people and the Austin culture made her feel like she was a foreigner. Natalia also expressed that she had always thought of herself as "just American" until she came to Austin, where she found it very hard to find friends and study partners who were white. She also noticed that international students would think of her only as Mexican, not American. As an

[7] The University of Texas 2010 - 2011 Statistical Handbook: Students

international student myself, I can attest to the power of mainstream American media, which pushes the idea that America is white and everyone else is a deviation from the American norm. Mary herself met a girl whom she said had a "white mind:"

Mary: She had a very white mind (she laughs).

Juan**:** A very white mind?

> Mary**:** Like, I say white because they think that America is white. That America, that American language is English. That, you know, like they just focus on White America and getting people to be White American, you know?

Trying to make people "think white" is part of what Charles Mills (1999) called the "Racial Contract," where white people seek control through epistemic authority. In Chapter 1, I explained how students feel compelled to bend their reality to match white men and women's reality in exchange for acceptance into privileged spaces. Thus, even when Mary found out that there were other Hispanic people in one of her classes, she could not relate to them as much. These were people who did not know Spanish and who, as she mentions, would sometimes go out of their way to reject Mexican or other Latina culture. In one instance, Mary was in a class and a teacher asked if anyone knew Spanish:

> And only me and another friend that I knew like, raised our hands and everybody was like: "Oh that's so cool!" You know? "Spanish! Like, ohhh! Where are you from? Mexico?"[…] I was like: "What? You have like all a Hispanic last name. What do you mean if I'm from Mexico? Are you from Mexico?" Like (*the students in the group laugh*), um, it hit me like that, I was, I was Mexican. Mexican American, Hispanic. And that um, even some Mexicans did not associate themselves with that title at all. (Mary, Social Work)

Many Mexican Americans may feel compelled to hide cultural markers, as the ideology of white supremacy combined with liberal ideology push students to believe in sameness based on white and middle-class values (hooks, 1992, 2003a; Yosso, 2002a; Yosso et al., 2009), and erase all difference. This sameness, however, is based on what is considered normal (white, middle class culture), and Mexican culture is considered deviant. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the students are encouraged to pathologize their own cultures if they are to adopt the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity. In a

campus that already isolates students because of demographics, seeing other students that look like you but reject their history and their culture can be damaging to the students as well. Mary shared that some of her roommates would also look down on her listening to Spanish music. They would say she was being "super Mexican," to which she replied:

> I don't know what that's supposed to mean, like Super Mexican (group laughs), and um, cause I'm always like trying to cook like my mom, I'm trying to listen to all that music, I talk like in Spanish when, like I don't have to talk to you in English I won't cause I like Spanish a lot, um, I guess being here made me feel like, made me realize like that I was different, but instead of being like "oh I feel bad because I'm different," I like embraced it. (Mary, Social Work)

Mary wants to resist the normalizing forces that aim to erase her culture and her language. However, being around roommates and classmates who feel the opposite way and instead adopt only mainstream American culture make her feel even more different. Her passion for her culture and her love of her family help her overcome the accusations of being "too" Mexican, even from other Mexican Americans. Like Mary, other students expressed instances when they felt different even from other Latina/o students. Jessica, for example, said:

> I also met a bunch of Hispanic people that aren't really Hispanic, you know? Like, you wanna talk to them in Spanish and they're like "What?!" (*everyone laughs*) You know? (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

However, adopting this mentality that others are not "real Hispanic students" can also be divisive and marginalizing to those who do not speak Spanish or who for reasons beyond their control have lost touch with Mexican culture. After asking Fabiola what the hardest part of the interview and focus group was, for example, she told me:

> I think the hardest, I know like in the study, in the focus group, I think it was, definitely took courage on my part just to say like how it was from my perspective. Cause I know, and you know too, how my background is just so different. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

She attributed not knowing Spanish and not watching Spanish media to her parents moving out of the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas and moving around the state where education opportunity and work took them. Because her dad became an Electrical

Engineer, they were able to afford to live in a more integrated part of San Antonio, and Fabiola grew up around white people speaking only English. She noted that her mom calls her a "coconut," implying that she is brown on the outside but thinks like a white woman. Nevertheless, she said:

> But yeah, still, no matter, I see myself as a Hispanic female. Like I am Mexican American, I'm always gonna see that and like I'm proud for like my roots and what my family's done and everything. But, I know like that part I was like, "what are they gonna think about me?!" (*laughs*) you know? I really did think like, "no, but it has to be said as well." Cause I know that there has to be like other girls just like me that relates in the same situation. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Jessica, who mentioned on several occasions how she was thankful for knowing "proper" Spanish and wants to pass that on to her children, faced similar scrutiny from her mother. Because of her embrace of Austin's "liberal" culture (in opposition to the boring and simple culture that all of my research participants applied to their homes), Jessica has adopted several ideologies and behaviors that are very different from friends and family back at home. She mentioned:

> So my parents, um, they said when they came over here and I went back my Spanish was different. That I—I would talk like a white girl? I don't think I do. I still have my accent (*everyone laughs*) So, it was just a, like my, they were always teasing me over something. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

The fact that her family teases her about talking and acting like a white girl speaks to anxieties the parents have. Blanca's parents, for example, articulated this well:

> My dad's mentality is like, like even when I was coming to UT like for the first time he was just like: "OK Blanca, you need to understand that, um, like, there's gonna be a lot of things that you were never exposed to and I want you to know that like one of the first things is that you can't lose track of where you come from or who you are." And he was like: "And that goes for like religion, and ethnicity, and like all these other things." So he was like: "Some people may want you to be a certain way, but you need to like just remember who you are, and like just be that person that you've always been." (Blanca, Art)

The normalizing forces in Austin and at UT can take their toll even on "real" Hispanic women from the border. What is important to point out in these cases is the way

liberal ideology and white supremacy work to divide and hierarchize people instead of bringing them together and promoting solidarity in the face of oppressing discourses. Because part of constructing a "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity entailed pathologizing Mexican culture and rejecting it, as the Mexican women transition from their hometowns to UT Austin, they find themselves in a hostile racial and gender climate that pushes them to change. Depending on what discourses and ideologies the women decide to take up and reject, the possibility exists for the Mexican students themselves to isolate each other as well as their families. The "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity, then, limits solidarity and severs family connections.

The women in the study, except for Fabiola, felt like their parents already did not know what their daughters were doing in college. They had fear, and this often resulted in arguments and power struggles. These were some of the most painful experiences the students went through. It is very difficult and painful to try to translate the UT, white, middle-class world to their parents, a world that they are not allowed entering because of racial and class barriers. Adopting ideologies that justify hierarchization and the pathologizing of Mexican cultures just makes it harder for the students to relate back to the parents or even amongst themselves. Mary, for example, has to listen to Spanish music on her own, while Angie also has to watch what she says or even what she eats if she does not want her Hispanic roommates to think she is being "too" Mexican.

Nevertheless, the mestiza consciousness allows the students to find ways to work with the normalizing forces and combine them with their own culture. As Blanca put it:

> But I don't think [my dad] understands that there's like a difference, like there's like this boundary that's kinda… I mean I know who I am but then, at the same time, he's really like, he thinks that all my friends are really bad influences because you know, like, oh they're different cultures and they're just different people altogether. (Blanca, Art)

This "boundary" that Blanca talks about is the site that the students inhabit, or what Anzaldúa (1987) would call *nepantla*, the interstices between cultures. The students become *nepantleras* and learn how to live with ambiguity. Anzaldúa writes:

> [*L*]*a mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision. Within us and within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78)

On the one hand, the students in my study are encouraged to adopt the Austin mentality of tolerance and acceptance; a mentality they called "progressive," "liberal," and "everybody just love each other." The liberal mentality, though, also encouraged their distancing themselves from the "boring" and "backward" Mexican culture. On the other hand, parents are concerned that they are becoming "too white," or losing touch with their "real" culture. As women who inhabit the border between cultures, Anzaldúa writes:

> But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed […] At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78)

To survive, the women in my study engage in a constant struggle to find a balance between their home cultures and the Austin culture. For the most part they are successful in finding some balance and moving forward with their lives. However, this balance is undermined by the campus racial climate. In Chapter 3 I will look more in depth how certain relationships and classes (such as Mexican American Studies professors and their classes) can help combat the normalizing discourses and give the students new tools to reconnect with their families and friends. For now, the important point is that the campus racial climate pushes the students to feel isolated and can limit solidarity when Mexican culture is pathologized. This does not happen all the time, as the students themselves find ways to painfully adopt both cultures and work with them, but when it happens it creates stress that can be emotionally damaging.

At other times, the campus racial climate can be characterized by hostility exuded by the student body. Blanca talked about disturbing conversations she would hear around campus if she eavesdropped on people:

> Sometimes I'll just go hangout with my martial arts friends, like we'll go to the drag, and like walking back to campus, like um, I'll even like eaves drop on other people's conversations that like other groups of people are doing as they're walking down the same like path, and they're just like oh, and these Mexicans, and this and that, they're kind of like dissing it altogether, just the race altogether, they're just stealing our jobs, and I don't know what, and, it just, its really disturbing to like hear like just people saying. (Blanca, Art)

Chavez (2008) argues that the stigma associated with Latinas is passed on to their children, as Mexican American babies transgress the border between "illegal" immigrant and "citizen." Many of the parents of the participants are immigrants, and hearing people talk about illegal immigration and assume that all Mexican American students may be in the country illegally reminds the students that their right to be at UT and even in the country is questionable at best.

However, words are not necessary to create an environment where students feel excluded. Natalia and Angie both expressed how they have felt excluded from study groups and friend circles until they met other Mexican American students. Natalia mentioned that she felt alone until she joined the bilingual education program, where she finally met many Mexican American students. She said:

> [My major is] bilingual ed, there's almost nothing but Mexicans, Mexican Americans in the classes. So, I've been doing a lot better in that environment, because, like before, I felt like I didn't really have any support. I mean, I was just alone and I tried to get into contact with other students, trying to meet up with them for group studies. It just didn't work out, for whatever reason. But like, nowadays, within the last semester or two, um, like I found it just easier to make friends with my, my cohorts. And like, we, like we help each other out and it's, I don't know, it's just easier to keep in contact. I don't know if it's because we're Mexican American and we have like the same outlook on life, but I feel like that really has helped a lot with me academically. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

Natalia mentioned more than once how she never really made friends with white students, and followed her remarks with confusion because she felt that being from the

same country there should not be any cultural barriers to them getting along. At the same time, she had a hard time studying with students who were not Mexican. This goes to show how exclusions from circles of friends or study circles can have an academic impact on the students. On the flipside, opportunities for collaboration and solidarity can arise when Mexican American students come together.

Finally, the students mentioned how uncomfortable they felt when white students appropriated their culture. Blanca expressed her concern over white, female students wearing Mexican dresses:

> There's like a lot of people, like, I've even seen people wear like Mexican dresses or what not and like, they're like white! Like, girls. And they, they just wear it more like fashion, fashion thing, you know? It's just like: do you know what the context is behind that? Like, do you know where that comes from? Do you know the significance of it? Because, because there is a meaning through that clothing. It's not just any article. So, I felt like that was kind of interesting to me, because you ask me about what I'm wearing and I'll tell you. Like, I know. But I think it's just interesting just like how even some people here they're just kind of like wear something as a fashion statement but then they completely take off the actual meaning behind it or significance. (Blanca, Art)

Similarly, Angie mentioned her disappointment over white students wearing clothing that resembled Indigenous patterns. She alluded to American Apparel and other clothing companies, and said:

> It's very like, I don't know, sometimes personally, sometimes I see it like very offensive because um, they don't know what it is, they don't know the symbolism of it, so like, some of these items are like ceremonial or spiritual, they have like a certain significance to like certain people, and like the fact that like sometimes, you wear something like, that represents so many people, like the ideas, the spirituality, in a way it's like offensive to this groups because you don't know, you don't know who they are and you're just like wearing it because you think it's fashionable. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Someone else in the focus group asked her if they could be held accountable because they probably did not know that wearing Native American clothing or patterns was offensive. To this, Angie responded:

> I guess I can see what you, what you're trying to portray. However, at the same time, it's like how can you forget all these years of genocide? And that there were Native and Indigenous people before, here? And like, like I understand I guess, somebody may be ignorant to what this signifies, but however, just because they're ignorant doesn't mean that it's gonna hurt less. So like, to that perspective it still like hurts in the way that it's being used and commercialized. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Moreover, Angie reflected on how this is very disturbing to her because her parents have been marginalized tremendously for being indigenous in their own country and in the United States. She said:

> Even my parents, uh, I guess when they're confronted with the idea of being an Indio or an India um, sometimes it's kinda hard for them to grasp cause it's like, it just kinda grew up with that, and you don't really recognize, like you're just Mexican. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

This is a marginalization that Angie herself has felt from her classes and even from Mexican American and Latina/o student organizations that do not wish to help her and her indigenous students organization because they do not recognize it as something that is connected to the Latino culture in any way. In both of their cases, seeing the appropriation of Mexican and Indigena culture through clothing decontextualizes the struggles and marginalization that both Mexican Americans and Indigenous peoples have faced. As the students mention, it turns their culture into simply "fashion." The pain felt by the students is accentuated by the fact that the campus racial climate pushes Mexican American and Indigena women to erase their difference and feel ashamed of their culture. The fact that white students can wear these garments is like a slap on the face. Similar to what Natalia asked when talking about makeup ("so why do we have to be cholas?"), why can white students wear Mexican and Indigena clothing when these students are being accused of being "super Mexican?"

In the previous examples, it can be seen again how Angie's experience in Mexican American and Indigenous Studies classes, as well as her own feelings of marginalization as a mujer Indigena, have helped her find a way to speak back to the normalizing/colonizing forces that aim to make Indigenous culture invisible. While

Blanca tries to also have a critique of white women wearing Mexican dresses, her education experiences have not given her the language to speak back to society as strongly as she could. A curriculum that centers the white and middle class experience combined with the appropriation of Mexican and Indigenous culture work in tandem to reinforce a hostile racial climate that keeps the students in their place.

This cultural appropriation happens in the city as well, as Jessica mentioned after listening to Angie:

> Going back to that, I think one of the worst holidays for us would be cinco de mayo *(someone says "oh my god" quietly, other slightly laugh)* just because basically for everybody cinco de mayo is where you wear a sombrero to be funny and get drunk, you know? I think, you can ask a lot of people what cinco de mayo is for and they cannot tell you why they're celebrating it. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

Even in Austin's "progressive" culture, people around the city appropriate a holiday and make a caricature of Mexican culture. It was an interesting exercise to listen to these articulations and the students' frustrations when talking about how their culture is constructed as something to be ashamed off, how they resist this, and how this hurts them. However, when asked in general what their experiences have been like in Austin and at UT, they responded very positively by praising Austin's and UT's progressiveness and how open the city and the students at UT are to everything. This elucidates how the liberal ideology undermines the reality the students live and their identity construction. Moreover, the fact that: (a) others police the level of "Mexicanness" the students embody; and (b) the fact that some people can get away with appropriating a culture that is deemed inferior and out of place at UT, point to the boundaries of the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity.

OVERT MICROAGGRESSIONS

A third oppressive device used to limit Mexican, female students' subjectivities is the use of overt microaggressions. The students told me about some experiences where people directed attacks at them because of their embodiment of Mexican culture and Mexican femininity. As expressed in Chapter 1, one way to control Mexican women's

body is to draw attention to the excesses of a Mexican woman's body and judge their sexuality and gender performance. An example that has already been covered is Natalia's engagement with a white student who thought it was just normal for Mexican women to have children as teenagers. However, there are other ways to judge Mexican women to control their position in a racial and gender hierarchy. One that stood out was the eroticizing and exoticizing of Mexican women's bodies. As Peggy Sanday writes of universities:

> Every society reproduces its culture—its expected social and sexual identities, its attitudes, behaviors, and meanings—in the individual in the form of subjective dispositions. These dispositions are affected by the individual's access to the structure of opportunity, experience with social privilege, and internalization of sexual expectations. (Sanday, 2006, p. 63)

Female students' sense of sexual subjectivity and vulnerability in college campuses are affected by their social position as women in an institution that awards invisible privileges to males and to an extent white females, as they embody "normal" femininity worthy of protection (Castaneda, 1993; Sanday, 2006). Mexican women's access to the "structure of opportunity" depends on them performing a passive femininity that proves to the whitestream schooling that they have their sexuality under control. However, because of Latinidad, white students, faculty and staff may often read Mexican women's bodies and gender performance as always excessively sexual (Mendible, 2007; Molina-Guzman, 2010; Molinary, 2007; Valdivia, 2010). Therefore, Mexican women's efforts to build an identity that will not be pushed out of the educational pipeline are undermined by the meanings that white students and professors can assign to their bodies. This reminds them of their place in the racial and gender hierarchy, which assuages white supremacist and heteropatriarchal anxieties of brown bodies moving out of place (Collins, 2004; Cruz, 2001; A. Smith, 2006).

Rosy Molinary wrote in *Hijas Americanas: Beauty, Body Image, And Growing Up Latina*: "It seemed as if my womanhood meant sex and sensuality more than other women's; […] as if by merit of my ethnicity I was promiscuous and born to procreate" (Molinary, 2007, p. 8). Natalia, the most reserved of the students in my study, spoke of an

experience where a white woman called attention to her as an "exotic" woman, which caught her by surprise. As a member of an Asian student organization, she went out to dinner with a group of students one night. All but her and a white woman were Asian. She said:

> But there was like this one white girl. And she made me feel like I was the different one or something. But I mean, she didn't mean it. Like, pretty much we were all like at a restaurant eating and none of the [ASIAN] people liked cilantro. And when I said the word "cilantro" she was like "ooh, you said it all exotic!" And I was like, "what?!" And then like, I didn't feel like it [the pronunciation] was weird, but I guess for her it stood out. And like nobody else had remarked on it before. Like the way I pronounce certain words. I don't know, like for me it was weird. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

While I agree with Natalia that the student probably meant no harm by pointing out Natalia's accent, the truth remains that Natalia felt "weird" about it. Moreover, the fact that she called her "exotic" shows how even subtle dimensions of a Mexican woman's identity can be taken to represent excess sensuality. Myra Mendible writes that, ever since the U.S.-Mexican war, Mexican women's bodies have "offered a tempting alter/native: an exotic object of imperial and sexual desire" (Mendible, 2007, p. 8). One way to demarcate their bodies as exotic is through their accent. When writing about the way Salma Hayek is seen in U.S. media, Isabel Molina Guzman writes: "Together with descriptions of her curvaceous body and exotic looks, Hayek's accent is foregrounded as part of the sexualization of her identity" (Molina Guzman, 2007, p. 121). In this incident, Natalia was not the only person of color, but by virtue of being Latina the white student saw her as the "exotic" one, and therefore oversexualized. I point out this incident because, in an institution dominated by the clashing of relations of power, even the subtlest microaggression serves to uphold a racial and gender hierarchy (Gavey, 2005).

Nicola Gavey identifies sexuality as a way through "which dominant discourses of heterosexuality operate to reinforce gendered relations of power" (Gavey, 2005, p. 9). In other words, men and women's engagements with sexuality are negotiations of patriarchal control in which all forms of sexual violence, from the subtlest to the most grotesque, are part of a culture that seeks to maintain patriarchal control. In the case of

Mexican women, their racialized sexuality can also serve as a platform for white women to define their place in the gender/racial hierarchy of the university by pointing out sexual deviance. As Mendible writes, Mexican women's bodies' "racially marked sexuality signaled a threat to the body politic, a foreign other against whom the ideals of the domestic self, particularly its narratives of white femininity and moral virtue, could be defined" (Mendible, 2007, p. 8). This attention to Latinas' hypersexuality contributes to the anxieties that help shape the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity by keeping it in place through judgments. It also supports common held beliefs that Latinas' bodies are accessible, as explained in Chapter 1.

Mary also experienced an incident that can more easily be classified as sexual violence, but rooted in the same assumption of Latinas' hypersexuality. While she describes herself as a very conservative woman who does not necessarily party often, she has found outlets in Austin to push the boundaries of the "nice Mexican woman" identity that her parents expected of her. One way is to occasionally visit bars in Austin's entertainment district of Sixth Street. While at a bar, she had an incident that revolved around her alleged hypersexuality:

> One time I was at 6th Street and I didn't wanna dance with this guy. He was really like trying to dance with me and I was like: "No…" and some like song came on and he was like: "Come on! Come on!" It was some white guy. He was like, "Come dance with me!" And I was just like, I just wanted him to leave me alone. So, I was like: "I don't know how to dance. I don't know, I don't know how to dance." And he was like, "come on, you can't tell me you don't know how to dance, it's in your heritage!" (Mary, Social Work)

In this incident, the white man started assuming Mary's gender and sexuality by telling her that, because she is a Mexican woman, she should know how to dance. Leo Chavez writes that it is a common discourse to assume that Latinas' "hotness" is innate or genetic, resulting in the "'it's their blood' [or heritage] observation" (Chavez, 2008, p. 76). The incident did not stop there, as the man continued to harass Mary after she reacted negatively to his assumptions:

> Mary: I was like: "Excuse you?!" And he's like: "Yeah, like, look at me, like, I'm white, I can dance. You… it's in your heritage, you have to dance!" I was like:

"Excuse you! I'm American." He's like: "Well, *presumably*." (*Juan reacts to this*) YEAH! I was like, and then he tried to, to kiss me! I was like: "really?!"

Juan: Like right after that?

Mary: Right after that! He like, tried, he like came close to kiss me, and I was like: "no! Like, you think…? No! I don't wanna dance with you, I don't wanna kiss you, you're lucky that I'm not slapping you right now, you're so rude!"

In this particular incident, the man at the club assumed not only Mary's hypersexuality, but also questioned her right to be in the country. The construction of Mexican women as both hypersexual and as not really people (because they lack citizen rights) made him feel like Mary's body was available to him. This happened in an area of the city frequented by thousands of students from UT Austin, so it can be assumed that it happens to other Mexican American students as well. The pervasiveness of incidents where Mexican American women are targeted because of the sexuality they are supposed to embody can also be explained by the students' critiques of the media. As explained in Chapter 1, all the students unanimously agreed that they despised Latina stereotypes that reduced them to sexual objects, as there is a history of labeling Indigenous and Mexican brown bodies as inherently deviant (or as Andrea Smith calls it, inherently "rapable"). However, Mary also talked about how the media positions Latinas as always wanting to be with the white men, as seen in an excerpt from the in-depth interview:

Mary: Um, it also bothers me whenever they paint, you know, they either make us very submissive and like working for them, or they make us very sexual and super bombshell like, hot, and things like that, you know? And we're just so promiscuous, you know? We wanna, want to have sex with this white character. You know? We want, we want him, and that *really* bothers me (saying all of this in a very melancholic voice). Because, (*she laughs*) I'm Mexican and I'm not a bombshell. I'm so far from it and um, it's just too oversexified (sic) like that. I feel like it then gives people these stereotypes that they think that we have the music in us, and you know, like, we're just like very party animals and things like that, and that's not who we are. That's not, you know? Who we, that's not who we consist of. Like, we're more than music, more than sex, things like that.

Juan: Do you think that's the reason why that guy in the club just kissed you after he offended you?

> Mary: Definitely! Like, he probably thought I was just, just like: "Oh" you know, "here's this Latina and she's gonna dance all dirty on me, cause that's how they dance, and" you know?

Mary's experience and analysis of the media elucidates another aspect of vulnerability for Latina college students: the creation of racialized desire as a way to reaffirm male and white privilege. Erica Chito Childs (2009) explains that Latinas are constructed as desirable sexual partners because "white masculinity is reaffirmed through the retelling of conquests of other cultures, which can be symbolized through the conquest of women of that culture" (Childs, 2009, p. 71). Similarly, bell hooks argues that white men seek sexual contact with women of color because popular media constructs a fantasy where the raced bodies seem plentiful, promise extreme pleasure and danger, and offer new avenues to raise symbolic/colonial boundaries of "us" versus "them" (hooks, 1992). Therefore, not only are Latinas constructed as inherently hypersexual, but they're also constructed as racially desirable to fulfill colonial fantasies of domination (Childs, 2009; hooks, 1992). Myra Mendible elucidates this further when talking about how Latinas are read in the media through a white, male gaze:

> "Latin American" characters perform their ethnicity through excessive dance numbers involving "swaying hips, exaggerated facial expressions, caricaturally sexy costumes, and 'think-big' props." Shohat and Stam argue that emblematic character behavior and interaction allegorize North-South relations and reflect ambivalent feelings of attraction and repulsion toward the culturally different. (Mendible, 2007, p. 10)

Thus, Mary's example shows how her identity was once again being shaped by a legacy of colonialism, where the white man was attracted to her for being Latina, but by putting her citizenship to question he positioned her simultaneously as undesirable.

Not all microaggressions overtly revolved around Mexican women's sexuality. Other forms focused on pointing out the differences of Mexican culture from white, middle-class culture. While these may seem harmless, in a campus racial and gender climate that devalues Mexican culture and Spanish, these interactions serve to mark the bodies of Mexican women as foreign and thus their right to be at UT becomes

questionable. Mary spoke of working in the summers at a Christian camp that was, according to her, "like 90% white." While she and all the other white workers (some of whom were UT students) were cleaning one time, they asked her to play some Spanish music. She said:

> And they'd be like: "Oh can you show us how to dance?" Um, "I don't know how to. Like, I'm not a professional dancer because I'm Latina. Because I listen to this music." Like, things like, like that. Or sometimes it'd be like: "Your accent's so cute, where's it from?" Like, "Where's YOUR accent from?" (*She laughs*) Sometimes it would be like: "Oh I wish like I could talk like you!" They would try to like, imitate my accent. (Mary, Social Work)

Her coworkers were fascinated by her music and assumed she could teach them to dance. On top of that, they pointed out her accent as "cute," and would try to imitate her. Her "accent" and her music tropicalized Mary, drawing attention back to her body as foreign and exotic. As mentioned earlier, Molina Guzman writes that accents also demarcate sexualization of Latina bodies. When writing about Salma Hayek's roles in American film, she mentions: "Hayek's Spanish-accented English always already marks her ethnic difference, bringing to bear on her body a history of racialized and sexualized Western signifiers about Latinidad" (Molina Guzman, 2007, p. 121). This resulted in Mary feeling frustrated and insulted. Experiences like these drive the students to hide cultural markers that can draw unwanted attention to an alleged hypersexuality, as explained earlier. Jessica, who is very proud of her Spanish, had one negative comment to make about her skill:

> So, that's kind of a downfall cause I do feel like I have that accent. But I can talk my Spanish perfectly because of my accents; I guess you can't have win-win. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

Moreover, non-white accents can demarcate a feeling of foreignness that can lead to feeling out of place. Angie related her experiences with having aspects of her culture or her body pointed out to the experience her parents must feel as immigrants. She said that even though she was born here, being at UT makes her feel judged as an immigrant:

> Like how much like you get treated bad just because you like can't speak English properly, or like you have an accent. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Pointing out someone's accent, especially a Mexican and Spanish accent, while it may be a curiosity for white students, it is interpreted as another example of why the Mexican American students do not fit in. By being labeled as the "different" ones, the norm of "white" English, whatever it may be, is established. Thus, Mary, Jessica and Angie's examples show how hurtful it can be for other students to point out their accent and even try to imitate them.

Another way to denote difference is by social class. Jessica had an experience with a white, male student who questioned her taste in clothes and her social position because she wore Puma shoes. She said:

> It's the dumbest thing, but um, I used to wear Pumas a lot, and I still have a pair of Pumas. So he just, like I don't know we were just walking one day and "oh you have Pumas" and I was like yeah, and he was like "oh yeah, all Mexicans wear Pumas," and I was like […] this guy would always be pushing me at little things like that. He was always, and he tried to speak Spanish too, he's like oh yeah, he actually came from the Valley, and he was like, but he was white, you know? But he was always just associating the clothes, or if I ate something, and he was in my [*student group*] so I had to see him all the time because we had the same classes, and he always made like dumb remarks like that, you know? But to me it was like, that's so childish, you know, but like really, do you really have to associate, you know, Pumas with Hispanics?! I was like, come on, like, you know I was like. He was making it seem like, I don't know, like I couldn't afford shoes. I thought Pumas were good shoes. You know, but I guess for him, it wasn't. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

Jessica had trouble explaining this incident, as microaggressions tend to be confusing and a lot of emotional energy needs to go into making sense of them (Yosso et al., 2009). Moreover, since it was the first time for many of them to talk about these experiences, it was hard for them to piece the ideas together and still maintain the liberal ideology of "tolerance." Jessica, in this example, resorted to describing the incident as "dumb." Since it happened all the time, she had to develop a way to resist the constant "pushing" of this male, white student. Nevertheless, she could have done without the

stress, but the microaggressions served as a way for the white, male student to relieve his anxieties over Jessica trespassing the university space as a Mexican woman.

Other students have gone as far as trying to engage Mexican women in conversations of immigration, questioning their legitimacy as students. All of the students in this project agreed that others, particularly white and some Asian students, tend to assume that Mexican Americans are in the country "illegally." As Blanca pointed out:

> Even like the fact that, oh you say you're Mexican or what not, most of the time people just assume, they just jump to their conclusion that you're illegal. Not just the illegal activities that we do, but just like the fact that you're here illegally, like, I was born here! What the hell? […] [Other students] even say, like even harsher things, like wetback. (Blanca, Art)

Along these same lines, Mary had an experience with a white, female student who was in the Republican Party student organization. This girl told her:

> She started talking about illegal immigrants, and I told her, "I don't think we should talk about that," and she's like "why not? I just think they're here, they're taking our jobs, and they're taking our education." And I was like, I told her, like, "I'm gonna be honest with you, my mom crossed illegally," uh, "I'm an American citizen, but only through illegal means." "But you're like, but, but, I'm not talking about you, like clearly we are at UT together, you're a hard worker, you're like, you know smart and stuff, but all these other people, it's like…" "Well don't talk about those other people, because those are *my* people. Like you are saying that I'm not like them, but you don't know what they're like because you have never like associated with them, you've never really lived with them, you don't know what they're life is like, you don't know why they had to come here illegally. Like, you say I'm hard working, you say I'm smart, there's a lot of them who are hard working and are smart." (Mary, Social Work)

Because Mary's mother was an undocumented migrant when Mary was born, Mary takes this topic very seriously. The whole interaction hurt her and the white student, with a feeling of entitlement, tried to push her ideas and later redeem herself by saying: "well you're different." Nonetheless, Mary felt like her own citizenship was in question, once again making it harder for her to exist as a legitimate college student in UT Austin. Similarly, Blanca, who also comes from a border town, is equally distressed over people assuming Mexican American students are "illegal."

All of these microaggressions are deliberate attacks or remarks that point out the deviance of the students, mostly as it relates to their bodies and sexuality. A very high impact and potentially dangerous set of microaggressions is rooted on the assumed hypersexuality of Mexican American women. It can be expressed in very subtle ways, such as labeling Natalia as "exotic" because of her accent, but the pervasiveness of this stereotype can also result in more overt acts of sexual violence, like Mary's example of the man who forced a kiss on her. Other ways that boundaries are set up between the "normal" students and the Mexican American women is by pointing out the myriad of ways in which they deviate from the norm. This can include their accent, their questionable citizenship, and their social class and taste. The students must then spend energy trying to figure out why these microaggressions happen in the first place, and must then deal with the anxiety that ensues.

GENDER OPPRESSION: THE INVISIBLE BUT EVER-PRESENT FACTOR AFFECTING EDUCATION

The final part of this chapter will be dedicated to how gender microaggressions affected Fabiola's college experience. Although she said that she felt like she was treated equally in the engineering school, several incidents point to the ways that others tried to police or regulate Fabiola's and other women's presence in the school of engineering. While all the students experienced microaggressions that related specifically to their gender, Fabiola's experiences stood out because she is in a field that is very male dominated. As explained in the introduction, educational institutions have a history of denying the impact gender has on the educational system (Bennett deMarrais, 2000; Garrahy, 2003; Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). Students are told since they are very young that gender does not matter. Gender becomes such a natural way of organizing bodies and power relations that neither teachers nor students point it out as a factor in their education or any other aspect of their life. Men's superiority over women is taken to be so natural that it is not even questioned (Pateman, 1988; Sanday, 2006; A. Smith, 2006).

Nevertheless, every now and then Fabiola would mention how she felt isolated because of her gender in the engineering school. As mentioned in Chapter 1, her father

would help her overcome the emotional distress this would cause, helping her heal and giving her the energy to move forward. This goes to show how having a college-educated parent can make a big difference in Mexican women's college experiences. Still, Fabiola was able to identify certain mechanisms that put pressure on women:

> Going with the whole stigma as well, and especially being just a girl in engineering, they're, "oh you're really nerdy, you're anti-social," or like "you're not as attractive, you don't think about fashion," or stuff like that. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

All of Fabiola's examples would somehow relate back to the body (or its deviance) and to femininity. Women in her field, from what she observed, were judged according to their looks and their gender performance. They were prevented from even entering the field by being made to feel ashamed of their lack of normative femininity and sexuality. Being aware of this, Fabiola would volunteer whenever she had the chance with outreach programs to increase the number of women and Mexican Americans in the school of engineering. One time, while volunteering at "Explore UT" (the biggest "open house" that the university organizes once a year), she interacted with a student who wanted to transfer from San Antonio:

> I remember I was talking to this girl. I don't remember her name, but you know I was just telling her about my experiences and was like, "yeah, transfer over here if you want to, like I was a transfer student." And like […] I remember her telling me that you know, what she wanted to do and everything, and like she had really good grades, but then when it came to like her physics class and everything, and then she was like one of the few girls in there. And she said that when the boys would make fun of her, they'd be like, "you can't do this, you're a girl!" And then her grades started falling down. And then like I told her, sharing just like, "don't let anyone, like, intimidate you at all, like, in the end like we're gonna be stronger, and being a woman, like, in our field, like don't let anyone put you down and have your like mind set on it." (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Fabiola was shocked to hear this student say this and resorted to encouraging her the way her father would. While this kind of encouragement works for her, it does not always carry the same impact for everyone. For some people, it is better to point out the injustice than to try to muster the energy to ignore it.

A young boy who was listening in on their conversation contributed to the conversation:

> There was too this little boy, he overheard it too, and he said, "The reason why boys say that is because they're intimidated by smart girls." (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

This opened up another conversation in our in-depth interview about Fabiola's dating experience as an engineering woman. The fact that she is in that space is troubling not only to engineers, but also to men outside her school. Men are almost always intimidated by her, and it is her determination to fulfill her goals in combination with her father's encouragement that keeps her going. She said:

> That was one thing like, they're really intimidated by like a girl that has like intelligence and like, I guess like the whole little baggage not to, like, and yeah I can say for myself, like with the past guys I've dated. Like, "are you jealous or something?" Or like, especially with a guy that I don't know what is going right now […] And I just told him straight up, like, "I just need to know like, are you jealous of me?" He said, "Yes." (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Men who date her will punish her for transgressing into a male dominated field by stigmatizing her. Fabiola was not the only one concerned with these social forces that kept women from entering the engineering field. She mentioned how the president of an organization of women in STEM fields urged her not to mention this to students interested in the engineering program:

> I was a day mentor with her and, I remember her saying too, "Oh when you're talking to the girls and all, don't like ever bring that up," cause that's another thing that she felt herself too. When, she actually did mechanical engineering in her undergrad, and I forgot exactly where. But yeah, like, just like, "you know a lot of people are quick to think that about you, you know, girls in engineering that like the whole stigma, you're nerdy, unattractive, like, don't say that to these high school senior girls. Like always just stick to the positive and what's fun." And I was like, yeah that's true cause once you bring that up then, "oh, well maybe you know, that's not something that I wanna be associated with." (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

While Fabiola found that focusing on the positive and not gender discrimination was a great way for her to stay on track, this may not work for everyone. One aspect of

her program that helped her was the fact that biomedical engineering has a critical mass of women. According to Fabiola, she believes there is an equal number of women and men in biomedical engineering, although men choose the tracks that most resemble programming and other individualistic lines of work, while women stay in the track where they can design healthcare products. Unfortunately, because hers is the program that has the most women in the engineering school, more than one person would tell her:

> I've had other friends like joke, "oh yeah you're the nurses of engineering." Because it's biomedical, so "ok, say what you want, whatever! We're still engineers!" (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

To label biomedical engineers as "the nurses of engineering" is to try to apply on them an insult based on the embodiment of femininity. This is another example of how the engineering school is hostile to women just for being women. Again, Fabiola's determination and energy kept her from being insulted by that. All of these examples of Fabiola being able stand her ground are evidence of how having support from family, especially if at least one parent has gone to college, helps the students to overcome microaggressions that compel others to leave. Delgado-Bernal would argue that it is the "pedagogies of the home" that helped Fabiola stay in the engineering school. She writes:

> Chicana college students develop tools and strategies for daily survival within an educational system that often excludes and silences them. The communication, practices and learning that occur in the home and community, what I call pedagogies of the home, often serve as a cultural knowledge base that helps Chicana college students negotiate the daily experiences of sexist, racist, and classist microaggressions. (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 624)

Fabiola was only able to get through Engineering because her parents were the rock keeping her grounded and shielding her from oppression or helping her heal. Her dad, especially, has faced discrimination in college and in the field, which she shares with her so she can better navigate the university. She speaks the following of her parents:

> I think it all comes down to my parents. As cliché as that sounds, but, yeah, like I'm so close to them. I know I couldn't have made it through without them. And more than anything like, my dad, just cause of like all his whole story and just hearing from him how he made it through engineering […] For my dad, given his whole experience, he can relate with my classes, and he's like "oh yeah, circuits!"

> [*laughs about engineering jokes*] And like my mom too, just making me laugh and constantly being the support, "ok, if you fall down, get up and try again. Every day is a new day." That type of deal. She always sees the positive in everything, and that is reflected on me. My parents are awesome (*laughs*). (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Fabiola's father shared with her many of his experiences with discrimination, and Fabiola would talk about him overcoming discrimination with pride. She would say:

> Knowing, you know, that I'm a Hispanic female, fighting, going back to the stigmas, that we have and you know I really wanna help change that. And I know my dad has definitely had to fight it, and um, not only just like what he's dealt with, like, being out in the industry. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

In addition, for her, his struggle was not his alone, but a combined struggle from the family's sacrifices. For example, she describes her mother as having:

> …been the whole support. Getting my dad through school, then me, and now my brother, he's been going for two years. So, we hoped that she would go back, at least for herself, but, you know, it's… without her support this whole time, none of us would've made it through. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Her father has also made the sacrifice of living away from his family, and his job requires him to travel to Asia very often, resulting in family stress. Still, a combination of factors allowed Fabiola to maintain a relationship with her family. First, her dad had gone to university, which made Fabiola's college world familiar to him. She said:

> Like I know my dad faced the same situations when he was going through double E (*electrical engineering classes*), like with his partners. And um, that's really helped us too to like stick together and like see ourselves through to graduation. I don't know if it's a different time or whatever, like with my dad, but I know so many of them dropped out and just him and I don't know how many that were left, with senior design, it's awesome that he made it through. […] He's the one that really like comes from the bottom and he made something of himself. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Fabiola did not have to invest any emotional energy into trying to translate that world to him, while all of the other students found it painful to not only be unable to explain to their parents what was going on, but also to think that their parents were not allowed to enter that world. Secondly, because Fabiola had grown up surrounded by

white people, she was what her mom would call a "coconut." This was no accident, as she shared with me that her parents made a conscious choice to have her grow up in that environment:

> When I heard the other girls like in the study (*she's referring to the focus group discussion*), I mean I felt like so different from them in that sense? When they felt like a little intimidated like, the whole like, white woman, like coming up here… Like, I've always been around them. If anything like, my parents they told me straight up too, "we didn't want you and [your brother] to be like intimidated by anyone," like, cause that's how it was when they were growing up. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

Because her parents made this choice, they had for years developed ways of coping with Fabiola's and their own "acculturation." The other students, however, had simply been thrown into a completely new world, and the changes that were happening (coupled with the push to stigmatize Mexican culture) were divisive for the students, their families and their communities. Nonetheless, Fabiola was also affected by the liberal ideology that the university pushes on students. It compelled her to think that everyone had the same opportunity and anyone who failed was just "jealous," a way of looking at things that very likely made students like the rest of the women I interviewed suspicious and angry at students like Fabiola. Either way, Fabiola did what she could with the resources available to her, including her dad's experiences and her family's adoption of liberal ideology. She was being successful and always kept in mind a mission to help other women, particularly Mexican women, achieve what she had achieve, either by reaching out through programs offered by UT or simply by being a role model.

DISCUSSION CHAPTER 2

bell hooks writes that, in education, highlighting racial and gender oppression challenges "the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that [white students] think will make racism disappear" (hooks, 1992, p. 167). She continues, "[white students] have a deep emotional investment in the myth of 'sameness'" (hooks, 1992, p. 167), which validates their identity as individuals who deserve all of their privileges because they worked hard for them. hooks notes that pushing someone to not recognize

difference and see the inner working of oppression is in itself a racist act (I would add a heterosexist one as well). This is the environment my research participants enter when they become college students in Austin, and it is a sanctioned logic that they need to adopt to maintain the "good student" and "nice Mexican woman" image.

Therefore, even though the students feel compelled to express very positive views of UT and Austin as "progressive" and "liberal" places, the very liberalism creates an environment that pathologizes and then censors racial and gender difference in order to uphold a racial and gender hierarchy that awards privilege to whiteness and heteropatriarchy. In other words, the women in my project have to construct their identities in a place where white and male students want to keep their privilege. They bump into barriers and are put "in their place" through microaggressions that I have identified as: (1) a white, middle-class and heteropatriarchal curriculum; (2) a white supremacist and heterosexist campus climate; (3) overt insults and highlighting of deviance; and (4) the devaluation of femininity, especially in the engineering school.

Many of the insults were shaped because Latinidad gave white students and faculty a preconceived understanding of what the Mexican women in the study stand for. Many of the stereotypes in Latinidad are disseminated by the media. Patricia Hill Collins (2004) engages with these ideas from the point of view of Black women in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. She writes that stereotypes of women of color demarcate Otherness in the form of abnormal sexuality that helps justify the regulation over their actions and mobility in society. She also gives the media close attention because contemporary racist hierarchies rely "more heavily on mass media to reproduce and disseminate the ideologies needed to justify racism" (Collins, 2004, p. 34). According to her, distributing racial and gender difference as a commodity in the form of superstars such as Jennifer Lopez helps "manufacture the consent that makes the new racism appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable" (Collins, 2004, p. 34). She adds, "in order to prosper, systems of oppression must regulate sexuality, and they often do so by manufacturing ideologies that gender some ideas commonsensical while obscuring others" (Hill Collins, 2005, p. 36). This logic justified the microaggressions.

While the students did not just take the insults, they were limited in the way they could respond by the resources and discourses available to them. Most classes did not provide the students with a language that can speak back to the normalizing social forces as loud as the students wished. The exception was Angie with her articulations of oppression that indigenous and Mexican peoples have historically dealt with. Moreover, the students are limited by the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity because, as discussed in Chapter 1, they are expected to be "tolerant" of the microaggressions. Nevertheless, what worked best in disrupting the racist and sexist microaggressions was to point them out and to find solidarity in other students or parents (in Fabiola's case). As Peggy Sanday and Richard Dyer make clear, the power of heteropatriarchy and white supremacy stems from being considered "the norm," so pointing racist and heterosexist acts for what they are dislodges them from their position of centrality (Dyer, 1997; Sanday, 2006).

It was also observed that the campus racial climate can create a "divide and conquer" set of behavior, where Mexican students also participate in the policing of each other by stigmatizing Mexican culture. Moreover, this stigmatization affects the ways the students see their own families, who often stand in opposition to the liberal, white-centric ideologies the students need to adopt to survive in college. Already plagued by guilt and pain for not being able to translate the university world to their parents, liberal ideology serves as a way to further sever relationships to home communities by labeling them as the ones who resist the "good" liberal change. They are, in other words, "intolerant" Mexican communities (Brown, 2006) who deserve to be looked down on.

Finally, microaggressions, whether racialized or gendered, undermined the students' identity construction as "good students, nice Mexican women" by showing them the limits of their subjectivity. They had control of the way they presented themselves up to a certain point. At that point, the lens of Latinidad kicked in, and white students and professors could see their brown and female bodies through a lens that distorted them. Latinidad allowed non-Mexican students and professors, as well as people outside the university, to read the students as hypersexual, desirable, uneducated, foreign,

and potentially undocumented. All of this served to put into question the Mexican women's right to be in the university, their intelligence and their accomplishments. It also served to maintain a semblance to the colonial relationship that Mexican women have had to white culture, particularly to white men, as evidenced by Mary's experience of gender/sexual violence with the white man at a bar. Mary and the other students (as exposed in Chapter 1) were able to point to this colonial relationship through their disdain over Mexican women stereotypes as hypersexual and their safeguarding of their bodies. This elucidates how important it is to understand the media helps maintain a legacy of colonialism (the Anglo takeover of Texas), and their potential consequence in the lives of the students. As Molina Guzman writes:

> To maintain ideological dominance and control, the colonized in mainstream movies must be continually and inventively reimagined as Homi Bhabba's "the Other"—the object that is simultaneously desired and disciplined, the subject who is almost the same as those who seek to control her but not identical to those bodies in power. (Molina-Guzman, 2010, p. 153-154)

Mary and the other students were simultaneously labeled as objects of desire through the exotization of their bodies (as prescribed by Latinidad), while being labeled undesirable because of their sexual deviance, underclass status and questionable immigration status. Even here, they still had the power to shape their identities and take advantages of resources that the university offered. In the next chapter, I will explore the multiple ways that the students can break out of this dehumanizing relationship with mainstream culture and enact change in their social situation.

Chapter 3: "Make that difference in what little way we can": Resistance, Key Relationships and The Media

> [Discourses on illegal immigration are] frustrating to me. And it's actually the reason I do, I'm doing what I'm doing, social work. And for my masters I want to do policy. I want to be [the daughter of an illegal immigrant] who got her education and is trying to change the way people view illegal immigrants, the ways people view Hispanics. (Mary, Social Work)

> I like to do a lot of outreach or like, I was a day mentor, worked with like high school senior girls that are trying to do engineering during college, and you know, tell them about my personal experiences at UT and you know, just encourage them, "don't be scared. If you're even interested in it, go for it." I think that just outreaching and doing stuff like that too, cause that's why we're here too, right now, cause we all want to have our voices heard, to make that difference in what little way we can. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

The "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity limits expressions of resistance by establishing a behavioral guideline for the students. Nevertheless, as Holland et. al (2001) write, the students exist in a dialogical relationship with the discourses, cultural artifacts and the people in the different figured worlds they enter. This means that they are in a constant state of being "addressed" by the people in the university, giving them an opportunity to "respond" in ways that can be resistant to the dominant discourses that try to censor and shame them. Thus, they are not powerless, but must make the choices that work for them in the particular situations they find themselves in and from the particular social location they inhabit. Even though dominant discourses and ideologies underscore their identity formation in this environment, the students in my study still found ways to change their social situation into something that worked for them.

While normalizing discourses were found in relationships with other students and professors as well as the curriculum, most of my participants expressed that they have been able to and/or plan to use their education to improve their own social position, their families', and open up opportunities for all Mexican American women. Their connection to their parents and other Chicanas through the struggle of living as brown women in a white, patriarchal world makes attending university a more significant process that also

provides them with energy to resist normalizing forces. Gloria González-López (2006) identifies this connection rooted in a particular social position as "epistemologies of the wound," and writes, "because of many forms of pain, we are all connected; because of our hope for social evolution, we are all united" (González-López, 2006, p. 22). In Chapter 1, I explained how Jessica used her education in management to take care of a situation where a white manager was prohibiting Mexican women from speaking Spanish in the workplace at UT Austin. She connected to the women by thinking of herself, her mother and her grandmother crossing borders into unknown worlds and facing challenges of language, immigration, racism and sexism. She said:

> I had to do a lot of standing up, because I felt like they were my grandma, you know? And I really fight back everywhere, and it's something that I really do value. That sometimes they can't defend themselves, so I think that's what we're here for, you know? To kind of speak out for them. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

As the quotes at the beginning of the chapter show, coming to college has provided the students with opportunities to push the boundaries of their identities. While I have been critical of the way social forces such as white supremacy and heteropatriarchy limit their identity construction at UT, I also recognize that even with the limitations they are able to change their social situation and make their college experience a positive one. The students are also motivated by their love of their family and their culture. In addition, their experiences as Mexican women also provide them with knowledge that helps them overcome oppression and enact change in the spaces they inhabit (Moya, 2002).

In this chapter, I will look at the some of the ways in which the students are able to exercise their agency and resist dominant discourses. While there were many acts of resistance, I focus more on how they resist forces at UT Austin and not how they escape dominant discourses from the home. This is because I want to keep my focus on their experiences at UT. First, I will look at examples of three kinds of resistances that Dolores Delgado-Bernal and Daniel Solórzano (2001) conceptualize. These include conformist resistance, resilient resistance, and transformational resistance. Second, I will explore the importance of providing the students with knowledge that is empowering to them by

looking at two examples of Mexican American Studies professors and a Mexican American female professor in education. Finally, I will examine how the media provided the students with two avenues of resistance. One is retro-acculturation through the consumption of Mexican media. The other is providing the students with a vehicle to name the oppression they feel, since naming what is invisible (e.g. white supremacy or patriarchy) dislodges it from its position of power (Dyer, 1997; Sanday, 2006).

RESISTANCE AND AGENCY

Dolores Delgado-Bernal and Daniel Solórzano (2001) build on the framework of resistance theory using LatCrit theory as a way to center the experiences of Latinas and Latinos in education. This allowed them to displace white-centric views of education and understand how Latinas and Latinos can engage in forms of resistance that are subtle, are not self-defeating, and create different degrees of change to social structures. I build on their own framework, but instead of centering LatCrit theory I center Chicana Feminism (particularly Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness*) to understand how my participants' particular position in the university as Mexican women can displace white-centric and androcentric ideologies. The students I interviewed are not critical race scholars, they do not all share the same language to speak against injustice, nor do they necessarily express a commitment to social justice the way LatCrit theory purports. Still, they have experienced Austin and The University of Texas as young Mexican women with a consciousness that embodies knowledge to resists social forces unique to Chicanas. They "live between and within layer of subordination based on race, class, gender, language, immigration status, accent, and phenotype" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 335). Because of their mestiza consciousness, which must consolidate all of their identities (even the contradictory ones), it becomes hard sometimes to recognize their forms of resistance and their agency. Therefore, I pay close attention to how they fight for their "language rights, cultural rights, and the influence of immigration status" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 335), among other battles.

Conformist Resistance

Conformist resistance happens when students "engage in activities and behavior within a more liberal tradition" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 318). Students who engage in this type of resistance believe in the current social structures and fight so that the social system works for them and everyone else. However, Delgado Bernal and Solórzano argue that this is the type of resistance that brings about the least social change, as it does not challenge current social structures. Nevertheless, the students' efforts to not be completely disciplined by normalizing forces or completely sever their relationship to Mexican culture, their family and their community are a victory worth noting.

Jessica, for example, would emphasize how she wants to use her education to improve not only her own life, but also the lives of other Mexican men and women. In addition to the example where she defended Mexican women who spoke Spanish at work, she would also volunteer at a tax center to help low-income families, as well as volunteer at other tax events. During experiences like these, she expressed that she developed a bigger appreciation for Spanish and for her culture, something that back in El Paso she took for granted. In Austin, her language skills allowed her to help people and opened doors for different job opportunities. In her case, her mother's efforts to make sure Jessica knew her culture and her language paid off. Jessica reworked a situation that could have been detrimental (she had an "accent" and she did not pathologize her culture) into something that worked for her within the logic of business administration (her career):

> Cause I know Spanish, it's a lot better, you know? Like, now because, you know, they say um, Hispanics are going to be the majority in like 20 years, you know? It's like, like I would get calls from people I applied with […] You never think it's a good thing, you know? It's like, you know Spanish cause you talk to your friends, watch novelas, and you talk to your grandma (*the other students giggle*) […] You learn to, you know, miss your enchiladas and (*the group giggles*) just learn your culture a lot better, and just know what you had that you never really appreciated. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

Jessica tries to embrace her culture as much as she can now, and so far it is working for her. While she did express concern and frustration over microaggressions and other situations that were detrimental to Mexican women, she was one of the students who was the least stressed and had a very positive outlook on her career. Because she works in business, employers recognize the importance of hiring people who can reach out to Latina/o populations. Jessica has been able to work within the structures of the private sector without changing them much, but she has been able to resist many normalizing forces that would keep her from finding solidarity with other Mexican Americans or even with her mother, whom she is extremely close to. In fact, she picked up management in her career as a way to have a connection to people. She said:

> Accountants are supposed to be in their cubicles as well, and I picked up management just because I like to have relationships so much. I wanted to help the people that were cleaning the floors, and have them get their rights heard, you know? (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

In line with Delgado Bernal and Solórzano's (2001) framework of conformist resistance, Jessica was able to work within the system and was able to resist oppression thanks to the love and support from her mother, as well as her passion for her culture.

Resilient Resistance

Another type of resistance that resembles conformist resistance is *resilient resistance*. Inspired by Tara Yosso, Delgado Bernal and Solórzano (2001) write that there is tremendous resistance in students who are motivated to fight racial and gender stigmas. This is akin to them trying to prove mainstream culture wrong for having little faith in them. At the same time, they are motivated to elevate the image of other Mexicanas/os and Chicanas/os. Yosso defines resilient resistance as "surviving and/or succeeding through the educational pipeline as a strategic response to visual microaggressions" (quoted from Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 320).

As mentioned towards the end of Chapter 2, Fabiola was under constant pressure of microaggressions because of being a woman in engineering. People would not think

she was actually an engineering student or they would predict that she would soon drop out of engineering. However, she said she did not let that stop her:

> (*Sigh*) Ok well, here's the thing. Like, I know just with me in general, I like have met people in the past who like… I never get engineering, first of all. Cause it's always been art or education. So that first of all tells me to like, well, you can't see me doing like what I'm doing? Or like, you don't think, like I don't look as smart or something? You know. And like that's a little hurtful in itself, too, but at the same time it's like, surprise! You know? Like, this is actually what I'm doing and it's really cool. Like, just to kind of see their reaction to it as well! (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

While her father and mother help her overcome many of the microaggressions she faces by being a source of energy and inspiration, it is her own resilience to prove people wrong that also keeps her going. She also mentioned that it is important for her to know that her best effort is a reflection on Mexican American women as a whole:

> I feel like if you make a change on your own, and you try to do the best for yourself, and everyone does that, that ultimately makes a big effect on people, how they see us as Mexican Americans. I know me, trying my hardest, you know? I have my goals and as long as I make myself proud and try to make my family proud too, that's ultimately what matters to me in the end. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)

In the end, Fabiola acts as a trailblazer for other Mexican women to look up to. While she also does not challenge the social structure directly, her position is different from Jessica's. Businesses recognize the skills that Mexican women can bring to their bottom line. In Fabiola's case, almost no one believed in her and she faced numerous, major obstacles that attacked her just for being a woman, showing her that engineering had no space for her. Therefore, proving all those people wrong and pushing herself into that space creates a change in itself. The boundaries of the space are redefined as her brown, female body enters a space traditionally reserved for white or Asian male bodies (Puwar, 2004). As more women of color enter engineering, the social structure will have to accommodate them. Moreover, younger generations will be able to find support in the women who were there before them, just like Fabiola has found it by working with older women who run STEM organizations.

Transformational Resistance

Finally, *transformational resistance* happens when students have a critical view of the structures that cause oppression and are motivated by a desire for social change. Delgado Bernal and Solórzano identify this as the type of resistance that is the most likely to result in social change. At the same time, it is not self-defeating, as it elevates the students while preventing mainstream, oppressive forces from becoming more powerful. One way to think about it is that students do not get in trouble with the law because of their resistance, white-centric and androcentric perspectives do not gain more legitimacy because of the students' downfall (or lack of), yet structural change happens.

While all the students achieved different kinds of transformations both in themselves and the structures they were in, the example that stood out the most was Angie's, who joined a budding Chicana student group (which I call "Chicana Org." for privacy reasons) as well as created a student group for Indigenous students. She first spoke about joining the Chicana student group after she had already been a part of MEChA. As she mentioned:

> My first organization, um, was MEChA. So, um, they were good for like, a point. […] I guess MEChA was a lot of my angry organization, like (*she laughs*) "let's go protest, or like, do something, I don't know." So, I mean, but they were, I think I really hold them in really dear because they were the first organization that approached me. […] So, and then, um, I guess end of sophomore year I started becoming involved with [Chicana Org]. I think they were a really cool group because, um, I started taking a leadership position over it, and I kind of realized how, like necessary it was in creating bonds between, I guess, a lot of female students and queer students. Because, especially as I saw in MEChA, sometimes like a lot of the males would get like all like all of the, I guess, not pride, but like, como se dice, los alagaban. With the [Chicana Org] it was like, it was like "well we don't want none of that. We want, like, we're all like equal." It wasn't like, it wasn't hierarchical. So it was a lot of like, "ok we're gonna work together and this is the projects, do we wanna work on this?" […] So it was a lot of opportunity, and at the same time creating that bond because it creates a home away from home. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

By finding a space that specifically centered Chicanas' bodies and concerns, Angie was able to develop her skills more than she could at MEChA. The structure of

opportunity at MEChA was limited for her because she was a woman. Moreover, it was a hierarchical organization with leadership positions mostly occupied by men. The Chicana organization, however, was created as a non-hierarchical organization. Angie was able to find opportunities to take on leadership positions a lot easier, as well as participate in projects that were of interest to her.

Similarly, Angie felt like she had to create a space for Indigenous students because their invisibility was even more pronounced. She told the story of how it was created:

> So it's like a new organization that was created cause, uh, after doing some research we learned that Native Americans aren't in the spotlight here at UT. Um, our friend [Name] he looked through articles of the Daily Texan [university newspaper] and only one article showed Native American or Indigenous people in the whole history of UT Daily Texan. So it was only one article. And that article was actually, it was like an article of an event that MEChA had put, and it was like, his freshman year. And he was in it. So, he was like "what? That's the only event we've ever had?" So it was mind blowing. So, well, we need to bring light to these issues and realize how we're not being like spotlighted, or not included in these other communities that we're a part of. So that's why we found the necessity to create it. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

The reception of her group has been mixed. She has experienced some resistance to the Indigenous students group. For example, when participating in a multicultural event that the university was organizing, other cultural groups from around the country and around the world stared at the students who showed up dressed in traditional Indigenous clothing under a colonizing gaze. Angie and her friend felt like they were being scrutinized, creating a feeling of marginalization and objectification that was also incredulous of indigenous people's existence at UT. Moreover, the Latino Leadership Council, the umbrella organization for all Hispanic/Latina/o student organizations, were not open to supporting her organization because they did not recognize it as something related to them:

> For a symposium we had last year […] we approached Latino Leadership Council and they said something about "oh well we're not sure if we can give you funds. We are a Latino organization." And like, really? Because indigenous peoples

> aren't Latinos?! (*she laughs*) What do you mean? Like, I don't know. It's just been a lot of that. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Angie was also able to articulate an observation she has made regarding more "mainstream" Hispanic organizations after participating in the Chicana and the Indigenous student organizations:

> For, sometimes, these Latinos it's more like individualistic. Like "oh I did, I just got an internship, I don't know, in Washington," and you know, that's it. […] It's more like them and their views and their like prosperity, and not really about prosperity of the community. So I feel like that's something that like has been different from my experience than other students. And I've tried pushing that in people, like, in the Latino Leadership Council. But it seems like that's not their priority. Their priority is just like, get in to UT, get a degree, and like get out. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

On a more positive note, Angie's Indigenous student organization has been received well by the administration of the university:

> We're starting to create connections. [Names Professor], I think she's something with [division of diversity and community]. And um, so she's like "yeah, after the symposium, [the dean of liberal arts] heard about you guys, and he's really excited, happy that you guys are doing that, and I know that [male administrator]," I think he's something in Liberal Arts, "too, he said, he said he was also like happy that we have this organization." So as far as the administration, it's been really welcoming. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Thus, it can be seen that Angie has engaged in the creation and expansion of new spaces that adopt different epistemologies than the white-centric or androcentric spaces found in the university at large and Latino organizations as well. These spaces, while small, provide an avenue for the Chicana and indigenous students to come together and explore issues without being censored for trying to think critically. They are concerned about the community and not just individual prosperity, as Angie put it. They are also non-hierarchical, standing in opposition to many other organizations at UT in that respect. Moreover, they take into account issues of gender and sexuality.

They have also been spaces where Angie has been able to develop very important friendships and connections. As she writes of the Chicana organization:

> We have sessions called [Spanish word for women's support talk]. I guess we get together at like a friend's house and we just like cook and like put together dessert, or like just socialize. And it's like, it's good to like, not be stressed in that environment and be like in a safe space with like other people who are similar like you. I guess we learned like… I think a semester or year ago […] we learned that everyone in [the organization] was first generation [college student]. We were like, "what?! How did this happen?" It wasn't like we were planning it. It just worked that way […] We drew each other together. And I guess it's not like work, it's like friendship, "I need a place to stay because like my apartment," and um, so there's a lot of creating that. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

This is important for Angie, because as mentioned earlier, the Government Department has been very hostile to her. It is not farfetched to think that the students in this group were "drawn together" because they could not find a space in their departments or other student groups. Through the Chicana and Indigenous students' organizations, Angie has been able to find a sense of community as well as develop many leadership and interpersonal skills that she otherwise would not be able to in her main career path. In addition, she is able to organize events and discussions that allow her to also exercise her intellectual skills and redeem her identity and history as both an Indigena and a Chicana. These spaces do not serve white supremacy or heteropatriarchy at all, but they allow for Angie and other students to push the boundaries of their identities. They then take these new politicized identities to enact positive, non-violent change around the university through participation in student events, the promotion of newspaper articles regarding their causes, and their involvement with the community.

EMPOWERING CURRICULUM: ETHNIC AND GENDER STUDIES CLASSES

As Anzaldúa wrote, the students are forced to live at the border of two cultures. On one side, their families inhabit various Mexican cultures and are firm with their beliefs and valid critiques of white American culture. On the other side, white, middle-class values shout back at the Mexican culture and pathologize it. Somehow, the students

have to work with both and live in both realities at the same time (Anzaldúa, 1987). As they negotiate the different discourses, they encounter an opportunity to rework their situation and affect the structures they are in (Holland et al., 2001). Unfortunately, some of the loudest discourses they encounter are liberal ideology, including color-blindness, meritocracy, and even the push to pathologize Mexican culture. These discourses underscore the students' efforts to build community and solidarity with other Mexican American students and with their families, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Delgado Bernal and Solórzano (2001) identify key relationships that help students achieve transformational resistance. One group consists of *transformational role models*, which are "visible members of one's own racial/ethnic and/or gender group who actively demonstrate a commitment to social justice" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 322). The other group consists of *transformational mentors*, who use their own experiences to guide the students' development. After listening to my research participants, I found that Mexican American female professors serve as both role models and mentors that give the students the knowledge and the language to see their culture, their history and their families in a more positive light. These relationships assuage the feelings of guilt and anxiety that the students face as the university pushes them to reject Mexican culture and as their parents guilt them into thinking they are becoming too "white" or too "distant." In this section, I examine three life changing relationships the students talked about regarding relationships with Mexican, female professors.

Mary took a Mexican American Studies class cross-listed with Women's and Gender Studies. The main topic of the class was Chicana feminism and history. An excerpt from our interview describes her situation best:

> I actually didn't appreciate my culture as much. I remember my mom was always very submissive to my dad. She's been a housewife all her life. And I remember seeing her like, that's not what I wanna be. I saw her as my dad's servant. I saw her as the house servant. Like, she gave up all her dreams, all her life, everything for this family. And I was like, "I don't want to do that." I used to see it as a weakness. Like, like if she wasn't strong enough to get herself out of that, you know? And, and so, but once I was here, I actually took the Mexican American class, talking about La Chicana, and I read all these different books and things like that. And hearing my professor talk about actually the virtue in that, you

> know? That these women are strong, because who else is going to put up with that? You know? Like, there was actually strength in what I saw as a weakness. It's like, the strength to give, give up everything. The strength to be so selfless. The strength to always be there providing care, like, um, so it actually made me appreciate my culture. It actually made me see my mom as somewhat of a hero. Like, somebody that I can only dream of living up to. Because I don't know if I could do it. Like, I don't know if I could be as selfless. (Mary, Social Work)

This class allowed Mary to find the language to articulate some of her feelings towards her culture. Even though she might not see it, Mary did inherit her mother's strength. Initially, her family compromised with her decision to study at UT if she entered the nursing school. However, Mary dropped out because of her passion for Social Work and her passion to help others. Her father was frustrated because her social work degree would not pay her a high salary. Therefore, Mary made a decision to forego a more "prestigious" degree and a higher salary for her passion to make people's lives better—particularly Mexican Americans and low-income people. Thanks to this class, Mary has the strength to fight liberal ideology in her social work classes, as exemplified in the previous chapters. She admits:

> I had to open my eyes, like, what I was taking for granted. What I was not appreciating. You know? These strong, the strong women in my, from my culture. Like, the strength, the virtue of, of my culture. (Mary, Social Work)

The class also provided Mary with a history and pride of her culture that has been denied to her because of white-centric, K-12 education. When I asked her for her opinion about learning the history of Mexican Americans through this class, she responded:

> Mary: It's sad because I didn't know. And I'm Mexican American! And all I know is like the history of white people (*she laughs, then I laugh*). You know? That's sad! Like, that I had to come, once again, I had to come to the university to learn about *my* people, people's history.
>
> Juan: Wow. How do you think white people feel when they learn about white people's history?
>
> Mary: It's like, makes them feel very proud! Like, you know, because when you know your history it gives you a sense of pride and a sense of belonging, a sense of identity. So you take that from these people. You take their identity. They don't

> understand their culture completely. I feel like, I was like, and I actually had to come here to really learn more about my culture.
>
> Juan: Mhmm. So how did you, your identity develop, as a result of this class?
>
> Mary: I think… to be proud of my people, also shaped my history. Like, you know, like, it's like these women, these men, like they fought for things. They fought for me to be here. It wasn't, it wasn't just uncle Sam, like (*she laughs*), it was Mexican American women, you know, struggling for us.

Mary was now able to combat the normalizing forces in Austin and at UT that push her to pathologize her culture much more efficiently. She was also able to point to injustices that have been committed against her even when she has adopted a "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity. Knowing what she knows now, it is less likely that she would resort to only blaming herself or her family for the obstacles she faces. Given that some friends and her family cannot always support her the way she wished, drawing this strength from this class and from the support of the professor in that class can help her heal all the wounds that she has suffered by going through the American educational pipeline.

Angie, as I have previously mentioned, also took Mexican American Studies classes. She has taken more than one Mexican American Studies class, and has made great connections with professors who mentor her. One in particular was a Mexican, female professor in the department of history teaching a feminist class. Angie described her experience in that class as follows:

> And she was, like, her class was like also like, it challenged your thinking so it was like, ok, well, "We're not just gonna read this book and talk about what the author said, but look at it from different perspectives." And that was a good class and I remember, like, I liked going to that class because it involved a discussion. Versus like government, were it's a lot like, ok you listen to the professor and that's it. So, hers was more discussion. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Angie's education was enriched tremendously by this class, as it actually pushed her to develop her critical thinking skills. Government classes, on the other hand, relied mostly on a banking system of education (Freire, 2000), where students were just given

the information in a unidirectional manner. This professor also became Angie's mentor, encouraging her to apply to different programs because she wants to make sure Angie attends graduate school. This relationship has helped Angie believe in herself more, as well as given her important resources for her to fulfill her dream of continuing her education beyond her bachelor's degree. She described her relationship to this professor in more depth:

> She's been really, really helpful guiding me, cause I guess, going through this education, it's been a lot of like learning because, like I said, for like high school I didn't know how to apply to college. And now that I'm in college I don't like, ok… (*laughs*), "what do I do now?" (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

This professor has also filled in another gap left by the government department, which according to Angie was not helpful in advising her with her career plans. Angie believes that the government department is designed for (and therefore only serves) white or middle-class students whose parents already help them with their career plans. The help and support she found in the professor from her Mexican American Studies class compelled her to add Mexican American Studies as a major, and find the support to continue her career there.

Finally, I have talked about how Natalia expressed that meeting a professor in educational policy changed her life because she had never seen a Mexican American woman in such a high and prestigious position. Not only was she inspired, but she also felt a sense of familiarity around her, leading her to compare the professor to family. The professor received her very warmly and answered many questions that Natalia had. Moreover, she shared with her a book that she wrote, which Natalia received with great enthusiasm. As she describes this interaction:

> Natalia: So, it was just really life changing for me. And also, she told me about her book. And it was exactly like all the questions I had been wondering about. And like, she did research in that area, so…
>
> Juan: What questions, what interested you about the book?

> Natalia: Just about like school. How schools are so horrible. How, I feel like school systems are doing an injustice to Mexican Americans, and making them more behind than what they could be.

Natalia, Angie and Mary (as well as all the other students in this study) already knew that they have to make compromises to be university students. They have been making these compromises since years before they entered UT Austin, as they had to build an identity of "good student, nice Mexican woman" if they wanted to survive the educational pipeline. However, they have not done this silently. They know that inequality exists, and while they deal with it in different ways, there is no way any of them can be completely fooled or buy completely into the liberal education promises. While Mary's classmates and Angie's professors can think that the system is equal and become angry when someone points out the opposite, Mexican American women will know the truth of their experiences. The difference is that, for the most part, they have been denied access to curriculum that centered their bodies and their experiences as Mexican women. When classes like these happen, though, Mexican American women feel validated, but other students used to a white-centric and androcentric education can react negatively. As Angie explained about a Mexican American Studies class:

> So the way [Mexican male professor] teaches class is more like, from the starting history, is not just what's written down in the books, but it's about looking at it from different perspectives. So even then, like, he challenged the class. A lot of the white students were like, "what do you mean?" Like (*laughs*), so it was like a lot of like that, or, he would say like, "well conservatives" and people were like, "what do you mean conservatives?" and like, so it was a lot of questions were like, he challenged them to think outside the box. [On one occasion], I was like, "from my perspective, I think they were just like washing their hands and trying to like, um, I guess, forget that this history of racism existed at UT." A lot of like classmates were just like, "what?! Why are saying that?!" Like, "UT is not racist" (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

Pretending or thinking that whiteness or patriarchy are not real, or that the students who suffer from these systems of oppression do not know that they live a life of inequality, is "racist thinking," as bell hooks puts it. This is because this erasure "perpetuates the fantasy that the Other who is subjugated, who is subhuman, lacks the

ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the working of the powerful" (hooks, 1992, p. 168).

Therefore, these classes were extremely important interventions that allowed the students to expand their identities, not limit them. Turning the lens around and putting whiteness and patriarchy in the hot seat was a great strategy to help the students adopt an empowered position as the creators and holders of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002). They provided the language and ideas to help them heal inside as well as heal their relationships to their culture and their parents. Interestingly, except for Angie, the students did not mention these classes or professors at the beginning of our conversations. I had to ask follow-up questions before they even mentioned that they had taken these classes or met these professors. It raises the question of how the students are interpreting ethnic and gender studies classes during their undergraduate experience. Can one ethnic studies or gender studies class change their points of view or even provide them with enough information that is long-lasting and effective to counteract the liberal ideology of Austin? In the end, these classes are positive, but their impact needs to be further studied.

USING MEDIA TO RESIST NORMALIZING AND OPPRESSIVE DISCOURSES

The "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity pushes the students to reject their Mexican culture and assimilate as much as possible to normative white and middle-class values. In this environment, speaking Spanish, listening to Spanish music, watching novelas and watching old Mexican movies are all acts of resistance learned at home that help the students have pride in their culture, pride in their families, recover a sense of history, and overall reconstitute themselves as Mexican women in a white and middle class university setting (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Through their mestiza consciousness, they were also able to re-work what could be seen as a deficiency into something positive through a process called retro-acculturation. Moreover, the students in this study also used the media to point to the social forces that oppress them as Mexican women, making them visible and dislodging them from a position of "normalcy."

Retro-acculturation

> Retro-acculturation happens when we've assimilated to our new culture but then begin to search for elements of our ethnic identity to incorporate into our new concept of ourselves. This process might entail embracing traditions we've never had, or learning to speak a native tongue at an older age. (Molinary, 2007, p. 161)

As Rosie Molinary (2007) writes of her own experience as a Latina growing up in the United States, she had to go through a process of learning her culture, assimilating to white American culture, and then recover her own culture by picking up Latina cultural products. This happened to the students in my project through the consumption of Mexican cultural products such as music, novelas and old movies. While all of them expressed this, I will only touch on a few examples, as this is a straightforward strategy of resistance.

For example, as someone who has grown distant from her family because of her adoption of a mestiza consciousness that compromises with dominant social forces at UT, Blanca explained that she watches old Mexican movies such as *Cantinflas* and Pedro Infante movies to feel like she still has a connection with them. She talked about how this is something she learned from her aunts in Mexico while visiting them:

> It's not until I actually just sit down and I watch, I watch my mom and my tias interact and like sing the songs too, or like, just be like so silly, and just like "oh, the acuerdas de esto?" You know? "Remember this and that?" Like, they're just talking it up. I think it's very interesting, like, a piece of like… family. Like, "oh, we went to this theatre, and your abuelito took us here, and we saw this movie." So in a way it kind of brings us together and uh, I just like being there and witnessing that. (Blanca, Art)

Blanca experiences not only a connection to her family, but a connection to her past as well. She listened to her aunts and her grandparents talk about family history, which made her feel proud about where she is from. It also helped her push the boundaries of her identity, as she simultaneously tried not to become too "Americanized" like other members of her family. In this respect, Blanca had great control over the choice of media she consumed and appropriated what she wanted as part of her identity as a Mexican woman.

Similarly, in Chapter 2, I wrote about Mary's experiences listening to Spanish music and being called a "Super Mexican" by her more "assimilated" roommates. Nevertheless, Mary persisted and salvaged her Mexican identity through listening to Spanish music. She said:

> I definitely listen like to a lot more like Spanish music […] I associate that with my culture and like I want to feel like connected with my culture. I want to feel like home and that makes me feel like I'm in Mexico. (Mary, Social Work)

Jessica expressed this with novelas, as they were something that she used to do with her grandmother:

> I like to watch novelas, my grandma always watched novelas, so I still do. But it's just, you know, sometimes just to keep the culture. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

Jessica also felt like she started listening to music she had previously disliked when she came to Austin. This was music that her mother used to play but Jessica rejected in favor of hip-hop. However, once in Austin she realized how much she missed her culture, and again made the choice to consume Mexican music and incorporate it into her ever-changing identity:

> It's funny how it totally like changed once I started getting into high school, and especially when I came to Austin. All I listen to now is Mana, Pedro Infante, and Enanitos Verdes, all these bands that my mom used to listen, you know? […] I haven't listened to anything like radio songs ever since, you know? Ever since we came here it's just we put Pandora, you know, and, in the car, and he listens to songs that my mom used to listen and I used to complain, you know, and like my mom she laughs about it every time, you know. (Jessica, Accounting and Management)

It is also important to note that none of the students watched television, listened to the radio, or mentioned the movie theatre. They choose to consume their media more "in-demand," as Jessica explained above through Pandora, or Natalia's preference to use Youtube to listen to bandas.

Pointing to and naming oppressive discourses

One aspect of our discussion that related to media showed more promise in terms of incorporating it to curriculum and challenging the structures of inequality that the students live in. I initially asked questions about media consumption thinking that the students would elucidate their favorite shows or movies and how these become part of their identities. However, they constantly went back to expressing their anger, sometimes painfully, against all the stereotypes and stigmas that they hate, and rarely wanted to engage in conversations of something they liked just for entertainment (other than the music, movies and novelas used for retro-acculturation). The exception was Fabiola who articulated that she liked *Ugly Betty*, the now cancelled ABC show of a Mexican American woman who works in Manhattan but lives in Queens. She liked it because she could identify with the character. According to Fabiola, Betty had to constantly travel between two worlds: Queens (where her family lives) and Manhattan (where her presence is always regulated through microaggressions). Ultimately, Fabiola wants to achieve the balance Betty has in her life, which mirrors the reality the students in my study live.

However, all of the other students used the media instead as a vehicle through which they can point to and name the social forces that limit their identity formation. The most pervasive one was the stereotype of Latinas as hypersexual. In the previous chapters, I have alluded to Mary's example of how the media portrays Mexican American women as hypersexual and how it both bothered her and put her in a situation where a white man felt he had access to her body in a bar. I also alluded to Jessica's frustration with the media showcasing Latinas only as sluts or prostitutes, with white women always taking the better roles. Therefore, I will not dwell too much on this topic. However, I will point out that the only time the students ever criticized the white and mostly male gaze on their bodies as Mexican women was in our discussions about media. Every time I asked about how gender or race affected them in college, they would all agree that Austin and UT are so liberal that they did not feel an effect. If we did have a conversation about gender, it usually revolved around Mexican culture's machismo and the control families want over the students' bodies by not allowing them to move to Austin, or by trying to

push them to get married. Therefore, the media served as a vehicle through which the students could articulate their frustrations regarding Latina hypersexuality from a white, male gaze. These types of discussions could be used in classes to displace a white-centric and heteropatriarchal curriculum.

Other stereotypes that affected the students more directly in college had to do with illegal activities and immigration. Some examples of the students' critiques of these social forces include:

> It is a stereotype of, you know, of Mexicans or Mexican Americans, like resorting to illegal things to like […] make ends meet. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)

> What really bugs me the most [about the media], just the fact that "oh, you're a Mexican, you're a wetback, you're illegal." (Blanca, Art)

> So like it's really interesting how, like, to a certain point they're like, oh well these people are illegal, they're doing all these illegal things, like they're breaking the law, like, and everything, but at the same time they're using them to like commercialize and they're selling us stuff. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)

These conversations happened in order during the focus group. The students built on each others' comments about how it bothered them that not only were most representations of Latinas/os in low-wage jobs, but that most shows, movies and news reports showed them engaging in mostly illegal activity. This stigma led many white students around campus to create a hostile climate for the Mexican women, who were seen under suspicion and their right to be in the university was questioned. This conversation happened after the students had praised Austin and UT for being so "progressive." The fact that they articulated critiques of oppressive forces in the media and then connected them to experiences on campus elucidates one way in which the "liberal" and "progressive" dominant discourse in the university can be problematized to validate the students' experiences more accurately.

Finally, the media also served as a way for the students to point to privilege, which can sometimes be a more useful concept to use in conversations about inequality. Mary pointed out privilege when she saw a white, male comedian (Jeff Dunham) take out

a stereotypical marionette of a Mexican character, essentially a bell pepper on a stick with eyes and a sombrero. She was able to point to the social position of privilege of the comedian (a white male) and said:

> I think his name was Jose or something, "we're gonna introduce Jose." And I just, I was like "oh my goodness, I need to brace myself. This white male is about to, um, act, enact what he thinks is a Mexican role." And I was with, with my boyfriend, and I was like, oh no, this is coming, this is coming. And he brings out a jalapeño with a mustache and eyebrows and a sombrero. And the eyes were like half-closed because we're always like "mellow," like "chill," that we look like we're half-asleep all the time. […] I feel like we're portrayed like that in the media a lot, we're lazy, and we're always taking siestas, they even use the word siesta a lot, I don't even use the word siesta. (Mary, Social Work)

In addition, she also pointed out how white people also have a "savior" role when it comes to media, as it can be observed in the following excerpt from our interview:

> Mary: Except for white culture. Like, white culture. They're always the saviors. They're always the, you know, it takes a white, white caring teacher to change all these minority students. You know? Like, things like…
>
> Juan: Is that from a movie? Or…
>
> Mary: Yeah! Actually they made fun of it on Mad TV, they, they were like, um, saying that this movie should've been called "Nice White Lady." (*I laugh, she laughs*).
>
> Juan: What movie were they making fun of?
>
> Mary: I think it was *Freedom Writers*.
>
> Juan: Ok got it. I think that's hilarious.
>
> Mary: Yeah, it's like one of the Black girls. Like, it was in the parody. She was like: "you think that because you're a nice white lady I'm gonna change? You're wrong!" And then like she, the white lady says something like, "Write about it." And then she was like: "Oh, oh, you're such a nice white lady! Like, yeah! I'm gonna write about it! I'm gonna change my life!" (*we both laugh*)

Talking about this led to her analyzing other films:

> And if you see it, it's always like the white girl who's a hero, like. Even in the movie that came out recently, *The Help*. They didn't have their own voice until

> this nice white girl came and created a voice for them. You know? Like, it always takes from our own ability to fight for ourselves. It always says, it always takes the attention from the issues we're going through to, to what these white people fought for us. You know? Like, it's always like that in the media. (Mary, Social Work)

It is important to note how the media served as a vehicle for Mary and the other students to point to social forces that are usually deemed non-existent by liberal ideology. Peggy Sanday (2006) mentions that silence tends to uphold heteropatriarchal control in universities, adding that all students who stay silent about female oppression are complicit in a system that awards invisible privileges to males. Moreover, Richard Dyer (1997) writes that the power of whiteness comes from assuming a position of normality. By being considered the "normal" position, it becomes the invisible site from which to judge everyone else as deviant. Therefore, for Mary to label the "white male" as the oppressor is a big step in her being able to have a more critical understanding of how the social forces are affecting her. The same applies to her being able to understand how white teachers and professors run the risk of adopting a "savior" mentality that can position her as a victim and thus limit her subjectivity.

DISCUSSION CHAPTER 3

Throughout my entire thesis, I have tried to demonstrate how even when the students develop a *limiting* "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity, they are never powerless. The students' creative resistance often followed many of the examples I chose to highlight, including examples of their identity construction process, examples of the students adopting dominant ideologies, and examples of microaggressions. In this third chapter, I highlight other salient examples to further illustrate where one can find agency in the experiences of the Mexican American students. Depending on the students' access to resources such as dominant discourses, support from parents and mentors, and discourses learned in Mexican American and Gender Studies classes, the students could exercise different degrees of control over their social situation.

I began this chapter by explaining Delgado Bernal and Solórzano's conceptual framework of conformist, resilient and transformative resistance. Their theory is also in line with my theoretical framework in terms of identity construction, as they write that resisting the status quo shows how "individuals are not simply acted on by structures," but rather "negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these interactions" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 315). College can be a treacherous place where dominant discourses and students with male or white privilege can undermine Mexican women's subjectivity. Rosie Molinary writes of her experience growing up Latina in the United states: "I was someone who knew what it was like to be seen but not valued or heard" (Molinary, 2007, p. 6). The students in my project found ways to be heard, from Jessica's "smart moves" to report racist managers to human resources at her job in the university, to Fabiola's energetic words of encouragement that she told herself and other female students in engineering.

Moreover, the students found that through key relationships at UT, they could learn the language and the discourses necessary to better resist normalizing discourses that aim to erase all racial and gender difference. The most prominent ones were Mexican American female professors who provided guidance, support, and classes with a curriculum that centered Mexican women's bodies and experiences. In these relationships and in these classes, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy were moved from their position of centrality, a move that validated the experiences of the students. Natalia was able to answer many of her questions regarding the inequality she faced in her high school. Angie was able to find a mentor who would help her navigate the university and even find a way to move into graduate school. Finally, Mary found the language and history she was missing to see her mother under a new light and be proud of her culture and the many strong Mexican American women who came before her. In a university climate where these programs and these professors receive less support each year, it is of utmost importance to highlight these success stories. Mexican American, female professors are the ones who are putting countless hours into caring for their students, students ignored by their home departments that still marginalize and limit the integration

of women of color. These are also the women who encourage the students in my project to push the boundaries of their identities without shoving to the side their Mexican heritage. Future research can focus on their impact in the university.

I also identified the media as a platform from which to push their identities. The media served two functions when it came to pushing the boundaries of the students' identities. First, the students were able to resist normalizing forces that, according to Mary want to make everyone think "white," by engaging in retro-acculturation. By consuming Mexican media such as Spanish music, novelas and old Mexican movies, the students were able to maintain a tie to their culture. Moreover, their consumption of this media dramatically increased when they came to college as a direct response to other forces trying to pathologize Mexican culture. While the students spoke of other students who further stigmatized them for becoming "Super Mexican" if they consumed this type of media, my research participants were able to resist this as well and would consume Mexican media even if they had to do it alone. It is also worth noting that they would consume this media on demand, as they did not consume television or other type of broadcast media (except for Fabiola who had at one point been a fan of *Ugly Betty*).

In addition, I discovered by chance that engaging in discussions about the media and Latina stereotypes opens up an avenue where the students do not have to censor themselves as "good students" and "nice Mexican women." I cannot stress enough the relief I felt after listening to the students' critique of the media and of Mexican American stereotypes. Every time I had asked questions about how gender or race impacted their experiences in college, the students would simply respond that Austin and UT are so progressive that they felt like they were treated equally. On top of that, they would instead criticize the backwardness and boring nature of their home cultures comparing it to the more dynamic and "tolerant" culture of Austin. Analyzing this dynamic was tricky, and I discovered that the students were able to push the boundaries that their parents set around them much easier when they were in Austin. While this was a mostly positive experience (as they escaped gender expectations that were very limiting), the liberal ideology of Austin would compel them to stigmatize their own culture and prevent them

from seeing how the Austin and UT culture *also places racialized gender expectations on them*. These expectations make them vulnerable to racial microaggressions, sexual assault because of their alleged "hypersexuality," and censored them if they wanted to speak against this oppression. However, when discussing the media, the students were readily able to hang on to something that was not of them, yet it affected them. All of them expressed well articulated critiques of Latina stereotypes, such as their hypersexuality, the limited jobs that white people see them doing (such as maids), the savior mentality that teachers and professors will adopt with them, the suspicion that lingers over their questionable citizenship status, and more. Sometimes, the students made connections to their corporeality at UT. This drives me to suggest that discussions that aim to encourage critical thinking in Mexican American, females students should start in an indirect way so as to not disturb the identity of "good student, nice Mexican woman" too rapidly.

Finally, I discovered that some of the most impactful and long-lasting change occurs when the students gain the tools to point to privilege and to power as a way to decenter it. Whether it was through the media or through Mexican American Studies classes, when the students were able to point to the source of their oppression, they felt a sense of liberation. They were also less likely to blame themselves for not performing up to the standards set by white-centric education and middle-class values. Josie Mendez-Negrete emphasizes the importance of not staying silent when she says:

> The very values, beliefs, and actions about who we are as girls or women are embedded in the relationships we have to ourselves and to those who are construed as having more power than we. Silence and complicity with hierarchies of socialization through the family, church, and other institutions continue to restrict how we can act as sexual and sensual beings. […] Ideologies serve to reproduce the structural inequalities that continue to subordinate those who lack power. There is no shame in exposing those spaces of inequality. (Mendez-Negrete, 2006, p. 196)

Therefore, future research should focus on how to push the boundary of the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity so that the students do not feel compelled to censor themselves as shown in Chapter 1. If they do not censor themselves, they can more easily point to white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, pushing the social structure

to change while discouraging the students from trying to fit in. Silence will not make the inequality and the oppression disappear.

Conclusion

> I can't explain it, but I'm so much better for coming up here instead of staying at UT San Antonio. Like, I don't regret it one bit. I've grown so much; I've become more confident, like, I'm ready. (Fabiola, Biomedical Engineering)
>
> I think [college] exceeded everything I had expected. It really changed me, and I think for the better. (Mary, Social Work)
>
> College has like exposed me to things that I would've never imagined. (Natalia, Bilingual Education)
>
> So [college] just helped me grow and I don't regret anything. I'm happy (*laughs*). (Jessica, Accounting and Management)
>
> I'm still very, like grateful to be here. Because UT has provided opportunities that I would never have had being at home in Houston. So, it's been a lot of like learning and even though I've faced conflicts with these professors, it's helped me grow. (Angie, Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies)
>
> I feel like coming to UT was like the best thing I did to get out of [a limiting environment], and like really opened up my mind and my horizons […] I feel like coming here was the best thing. (Blanca, Art)

I had the privilege to work with six incredible students from different corners of the university to write this thesis. While I analyzed some problematic ways in which the university that they love reproduces dominant discourses that uphold white-supremacy and heteropatriarchy, statements like the ones above helped me realize they are also able to appropriate discourses and other cultural resources to expand their identities and make their experience at UT meaningful and positive. For example, they escaped social forces that expected them to be married in their hometowns, while at the same time managed racist discourses that encourage the pathologizing of Mexican culture here at UT. In other words, dominant discourses from their home cultures and from UT did not succeed in completely limiting the students' identities and experiences, even though they did help shape them. That being said, in this section I will give some final thoughts about Mexican women's identity construction in college, as well as some recommendations to improve the racial and gender climate for female students of color. I will then briefly talk about

some reflexive thoughts as I conducted this research, before finally concluding with my study's limitations, implications and directions for future research.

THE "GOOD STUDENT, NICE MEXICAN WOMAN" IDENTITY REVISITED

College is sold to students as an educational opportunity available to "good" students, with the idea that anyone can make it if they just work hard enough (hooks, 2003b; Yosso et al., 2009). Moreover, it is seen by many as a ticket out of oppressive conditions such as poverty. However, Mexican American female students, by virtue of their intersecting identities as racialized women with a unique history in the United States, face particular social forces that limit their access to college. Mexican women in the United States have been constructed as a threat to the nation because of their ability to reproduce (biologically and socially) non-white people and cultures (Chavez, 2008). Moreover, the United States' history of constructing women of color as embodying excess sexuality is an established strategy used to naturalize gender and racial hierarchies that uphold white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (Castaneda, 1993; Collins, 2004; hooks, 1992, 2000; A. Smith, 2005, 2006). In this context, Mexican women are held to tougher standards where their bodies and gender performance are policed through shame (such as in microaggressions), exclusions (such as being denied part of study groups or being pushed out of the educational pipeline completely), and by forcing them to demonstrate allegiance to the "good" liberal values of white America. This results in emotional and psychological damage for the students, as well as divisiveness between them and other Mexican Americans.

Over the course of this thesis, I have demonstrated that Mexican American, female students have to prove a record of good behavior on top of having to demonstrate their academic achievement. In Chapter 1, I explored how this gives rise to the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity, which is seen as the only identity that is rewarded by teachers, professors, and other people with power in the educational pipeline. In other words, for Mexican women to be considered "good students" they must simultaneously be considered "nice Mexican women." Being "nice" entails: (a)

pathologizing and rejecting Mexican culture(s); (b) demonstrating control over their hypersexuality and gender appearance/performance (they must not become pregnant or become cholas); (c) demonstrating control over their emotions and be tolerant of white-centric and middle-class values (in other words, they cannot be "fiery" Latinas); and (d) believe in UT Austin's "progressiveness" and "liberalism," including the acceptance of discourses such as color-blindness, meritocracy, and equality as sameness. However, this identity is very limiting, as it does not allow the students to speak freely against oppressive forces that seek to erase their racial and gender difference. If they do, they run the risk of being labeled "out-of-control" and deviant in other ways.

The pressures to keep their sexuality, behavior and emotions under control are not unique to the students I interviewed. Hyams' findings of Mexican, adolescent women in Los Angeles schools also pointed to the students' efforts to construct identities that show to white epistemic authorities that they have their sexuality and other behavior "under control" (Hyams, 2000). Similarly, Rosie Molinary wrote of her experiences balancing her Latina (Puerto Rican) and American cultures in college:

> [The admissions counselor] proceeded to tell me that I'd been granted admission not because I was an academic powerhouse, but because of what I could add to the campus [diversity and spice]. I felt the weight of needing to act polite, to be good, to play nice. I said nothing. Instead I let her offensive comment hang in the air between us. (Molinary, 2007, p. 6)

Part of the reason many students behave according to their expectations is because of what Charles Mills (1999) and Carole Pateman (1988) call the "Racial Contract" and the "Sexual Contract," respectively. Through a feminist and anti-racist analysis of contract theory, Mills and Pateman argue that women and racial minorities will bend their logic and reality to match the way white people (particularly white men) see the world in a white-supremacist, heteropatriarchal, capitalist society. They forego certain rights with the promise that they will be accepted into privileged spaces of society. However, this promise is never kept, as their mere presence in a university puts to test the boundaries that have historically been imagined to delineate the border between "full people" (white,

class-privileged males) and those who are not really people (everyone else, to varying degrees) (hooks, 1992; Mills, 1999; Pateman, 1988; Puwar, 2004).

Therefore, in Chapter 2 I moved on to study how, even if the students adopt a "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity, they will never fully integrate into the university under current societal structures. This is because, as women who embody racial and gender difference, they are trespassers of a historically white and male space that still longs for white and male privilege (Puwar, 2004). In order for the students and professors who embody white and male privilege to accept them, the bodies of the Mexican women must remain distinctly Othered so that their integration into the university does not shake the racial and gender hierarchy that is already in place. To regulate the integration of brown, female bodies into the university, white and male students and professors often resort to microaggressions, some deliberate and some accidental, that serve to put the Mexican women "in their place." The microaggressions can influence how Mexican American students attempt to fit in to UT Austin, resulting in emotional pain that can sometimes drive them to drop classes or switch programs altogether. The students may also adopt the liberal discourses of color-blindness and sameness, believing that whiteness, middle-class values and heteropatriarchy are the norm against which everyone should be measured. This encourages Mexican students to look down on their own culture, creating divisions between students as well as between students and their parents.

In a "liberal" or "progressive" institution such as UT, the microaggressions are even more dangerous, since "it is the less extreme white supremacists' beliefs and assumptions, easier to cover up and mask, that maintain and perpetuate everyday racism as a form of group oppression" (hooks, 2003, p. 30). These microaggressions are made to look even more natural because of Latinidad, the lens through which all Latina bodies are read as hypersexual and temperamental, among other stereotypes. Because of high school segregation in in Texas, college is the first time for many white students and professors to have an intimate relationship with students of color. Therefore, in the case of Mexican American women, Latinidad is the lens that informs how they will be treated.

Nevertheless, because the students' identities are never fully realized, in the process of authoring themselves they can pick up and drop discourses that best fit their social situation in order to move forward with their lives (Holland et al., 2001). Throughout this entire project, I have shown how the mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987) is an epistemology the students use to break from a Western epistemology that sees the world in dualisms and absolutes. It was in Chapter 3, though, that I showed more examples of how the students can subtly (and not so subtly) resist normalizing discourses and influence the university spaces in ways that can create structural change. They learn to balance all cultural expectations, even contradictory ones. Living at the border of many identities (Mexican, Chicana, Indigena, American, woman, student), the students learn to draw from different resources, create connections to others, and make their educational journey not just about themselves. Delgado Bernal observes in her own participants that "they saw their educational journey as a collaborative journey not an individualistic one in which they were only interested in 'making money' when they graduated" (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 635). The love from their parents and friends as well as their passion for their culture give the students the energy to resist dominant discourses. If they are successful in resisting normalizing social forces, they can proceed to create solidarity with other Mexican American students and potentially their parents. Moreover, pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) and a critical view of the media (Yosso, 2002b) can also help the students point to whiteness and to patriarchy (whether it is imagined in Mexican or white cultures).

Still, there are particular social forces that attempt to impose rigid boundaries on the Chicana students' subjectivities. For example, UT's liberal discourses such as color-blindness, meritocracy and "sameness" undermine the flexibility of the mestiza consciousness by promoting white-centric epistemologies that only work if the world is seen in absolutes and dualisms. Therefore, in Chapter 3 I also explored some key resources that can give the students an opportunity to resist these discourses and achieve personal transformation and healing. For example, establishing a mentoring relationship with a Chicana professor or taking a Mexican American Studies class can provide the

Chicana students with a language to talk back to the normalizing discourses. Moreover, using their own experiences as brown women in a white and patriarchal space can also inform the ways in which the students can resist dominant social forces.

Meanwhile, the campus racial and gender climate still creates feelings of isolation because there are far fewer Mexican and Black students than white and Asian students, and the ones who are there can often be complicit in upholding white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (hooks, 2003). Adding diversity just for the sake of looking progressive is not an answer, and the students did lament not being able to find many familiar faces in a campus of over fifty thousand students. For example, Mary suggested:

> If UT [is] to advertise itself as the progressive school, then it really needs to start acting like a progressive school. In all aspects, you know, like, it really needs to see that we're not all the same and you can't, you know, like expect the same from all the students because we don't have the same backgrounds. […] If they, they want to be progressive, that's the way to be progressive. It's adding variety. Like, real variety. You know? Like, don't be happy because we have 5% African American. Like, there's something wrong with that number. You need to fix it. (Mary, Social Work)

Bell hooks, who writes extensively about anti-racist, decolonizing and feminist education, would agree with Mary's statement that UT has to add "real variety." She writes that current ideas of diversity are still conceived by white-centric ideas that only support white-centric education:

> [N]o matter what the status of the person of color, that position must be reconfigured to the greater good of whiteness. This was an aspect of white supremacist thinking that made the call for racial integration and diversity acceptable to many white folks. To them, integration meant having access to people of color who would either spice up their lives (the form of service we might call the performance of exotica) or provide them with the necessary tools to continue their race-based dominance. (hooks, 2003, p. 34)

For example, even though Mary's social work class (used as an example in Chapter 1) has a critical mass of Mexican American students, the white student's point of view was the one that was held as the sanctioned logic or reality. The diversity in that class only counted in terms of how many brown bodies there were, not their ideas. Similarly, Natalia's experience of being called "exotic" by a white, female student

exemplifies how Latinas are constructed as "adding spice" to the campus and "enhance white adventure" (hooks, 2003, p. 34). Even in the face of these insults, the students were bound by the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity, which compelled them to be respectful towards everyone who insulted them or attacked them, whether it was deliberate or not. Given all of this, it can be seen that the students are going above and beyond to prove that they deserve an education at UT Austin.

The university can respond to their efforts and consider undergoing structural changes that would make Chicana students' experiences more fruitful and welcoming. One way to make UT more welcoming to students of color would be to fund and support programs such as Mexican American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies so that Chicanas and Mexicanas can have the option of taking a class that centers their bodies and their experiences. This can happen in the form of supporting faculty and departments/programs that already do this, or expanding programs and classes that promote critical thinking in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability and more. As explained in Chapter 3, these professors and programs work many times harder to ensure that Chicana and Mexicana students succeed and develop their critical thinking, leadership and interpersonal skills. Moreover, it helps the students with their self esteem, because as Rosie Molinary writes:

> Confronting how we're perceived can be an awakening. By acknowledging these images as stereotypes, we are more able to see why they're invalid, and how important it is to live our lives as examples of the multidimensional Latina experience. (Molinary, 2007, p. 128)

Another structural change can come from requiring all departments to offer a series of classes that teach critical thinking skills. Professors who specialize on different theories such as critical race theory, LatCrit theory, different feminisms and queer theory can be housed under every department, or belong to a special team of professors who teach several classes every semester to satisfy this requirement. This would encourage all students, not just women of color, to learn about the experiences of non-white, non-male and non-heterosexual students. This can be done as a way to start chipping away at the white-centric and heteronormative curriculum currently in place in most departments.

Finally, providing more support to students who come from schools that are poorly funded and/or who are first generation college students would make the transition into UT easier for new students. Many UT departments assume that every student is the same and has had the same opportunities to learn. However, this is far from the truth, as many of them are not prepared to read all that is required or do not have the study skills necessary to absorb all of the information in class. Moreover, the students may find themselves in situations where they have to work, take care of family, or mediate other pressures such as racism and sexism, which all have an impact on their academic life. This would require UT professors to be more mindful of the different students' needs and work with them to help them achieve their educational and professional goals. While it is not UT's job to improve K-12 education, given that students with widely different levels of knowledge, study habits and parental support are being accepted, UT needs to be ready to support every student with their different needs.

These changes would also be positive for white and male students. In a multicultural world, white and male students need to learn new ways to relate to people of color and women that do not rely on domination or subordination. Mexican American Studies classes and Women's and Gender Studies classes should not be seen as classes that just serve women and Mexican Americans, but classes where white and male students can learn to listen to women and Mexican Americans. This would enrich their education and show them realities different from theirs, which in the long run would allow them to form more meaningful relationships (whether personal or professional) with people of color and women. As bell hooks notes:

> Anti-racist educational settings not only protect and nurture the self-esteem of all students, but also prepare the students to live in a world that is diverse. The fantasy of white-supremacist exclusion is now pitted against the reality of diversity. (hooks, 2003, p. 80)

REFLEXIVITY

I have worked with undergraduate, female students at The University of Texas for the past three years. My last two years, I have done this work as an official master's student in the Center for Women's and Gender Studies. This project is something I am

very proud to complete, because it serves as a bridge between my intellectual work in the university and my physical interactions with undergraduate students. This was a very challenging project for me to write because I had to remain critical of my every thought and analysis. While I consider myself a Chicana feminist in terms of the epistemology I *try* to adopt, I remain fully aware of my own positionality and how it affects the research process. Therefore, in feminist tradition I feel compelled to say that I wrote this thesis from the perspective of a cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied man studying women's and gender studies at The University of Texas at Austin with a student visa. I come from El Salvador, a small country in Central America, and have lived in the United States for the better part of nine years. While I am no stranger to crossing borders, I did so with privileges, among them class privilege and male privilege.

Nevertheless, my main urgency was to pay attention to the particularities of the racialized gender process that shapes the identities and experiences of Mexican American, undergraduate, female students. My hope is that, by using a Chicana feminist lens particularly informed by Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness*, I have at least been able to show the importance of not just studying race or gender, but the intersection of both. Moreover, Mexican American women are an understudied group in higher education, so my hope is that this project will fill in some gaps in the scholarship.

As I listened to the students, I could not help but draw some connections to my own experience. First, I thought about my own experiences in the educational pipeline, which in most respects was vastly different, as I attended a private, international school in San Salvador, El Salvador. This was a British school where I completed the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (developed by the University of Cambridge), and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (international, college level education). I graduated at top of my class and also built an identity around being the "good" student, although mine was gendered differently for being a man. My sexuality and gender performance were never put in question. Still, the similarities start with the fact that I still received the praise and judgment from white (European) people. After high school, I pursued my tertiary education at UT Austin between 2003 and 2007.

Although judged differently from Chicanas/os for being an international student, my abilities and my right to be at UT were also put in question. Often, my class privilege allowed me to escape some of the worst racist microaggressions. Nevertheless, like bell hooks, I felt that "even the liberal white folks who supported and affirmed my presence simultaneously acted as though there was something strange and aberrant about me" (hooks, 2003, p. 96). I was asked on a several occasions if I had lived in the jungle, or if I knew what the Internet was before coming to the U.S. Interestingly, these questions came from both white people and Mexican Americans. Reflecting back, on the one hand I was problematizing the many rigid categories white epistemology depends on by performing well in Eurocentric education, having class privileged that allowed me to enter white spaces, and being insubordinate because I did not care to call out white people's racism and sexism. On the other hand, I was also reproducing many of the logics that uphold white supremacy and heteropatriarchy by playing too much by the rules and judging students (including Mexican students) who were not as successful as me. It took years for me not living at the center of society to start adopting a more thought out, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and feminist stance that would not only serve me, but this society at large.

Adopting a Chicana feminist mindset also helped me make sense of several attitudes I have had since I moved here. "No te vistas asi que no sos gringo." "Don't dress like that because you're not a (white) gringo." These are my mother's words that echo in my head every morning as I choose what to wear. My mom, who has never lived in the United States, somehow knows that I cannot afford to not look presentable if I am to be taken seriously in the university. I was always the exemplary student, and part of my success has also been a discipline that is contingent on having a Latino body. Other aspects of my corporeality came to mind as I studied the limitations of the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity. For example, a much as I would like a tattoo, I dread getting one out of fear that people will think I'm a gang-member. Seeing all the white, hipster baristas in the many Austin coffee shops as I write this thesis, full of tattoos, messy hair, mismatched clothes, and wearing sandals, I am reminded of what I cannot do simply because of my body. I am not suggesting that I know exactly what the students in

my study are going through, but I can at least find some connection to them through the "epistemologies of the wound" (González-López, 2006), where I can acknowledge that there is pain in having to regulate a brown body that is judged in unique ways.

Finally, as I wrote this thesis I was also reminded of what I am probably missing out on by still embodying a "nice student" identity. Will my thesis bring any change to the realities of undergraduate students of color? Is my scholarly work affecting the social structure? What are the ways in which I support white supremacy and heteropatriarchy? As I reflect on my own experiences, I can begin thinking of the limitations and implications of my study, as well as future research ideas.

YOU CAN'T SPELL "SCHOLAR" WITHOUT "CHOLA:" LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The first limitation of my study is the sample size. With only six research participants, I cannot call my sample representative of Mexican American women at The University of Texas, let alone the state or the country. Still, my goal was to understand the depth, not the breadth, of the social forces that may compel Mexican American women to adopt a particular identity in college. Guided by the mestiza consciousness framework, I was able to notice several patterns, such as the anxiety over Mexican female sexuality and the censorship that happens when the students are confronted with microaggressions. However, there may be many other social forces that I could not observe in my study because of the size of my sample.

In addition, being a man and an international student (even though I have lived in Texas for nine years) there are details that I am bound to miss. I have not experienced the same heteropatriarchal forces, particularly in combination with a racialized sexuality that is taken to be a threat, as my research participants have. To analyze their experiences, I have relied on my theoretical framework informed by Chicana feminism, observations I have made over the past couple of years by working with undergraduate, female students, and paying close attention to the stories my research participants told me. I could only catch certain ways in which their subjectivities were either limited or enhanced depending on the discourses available to them. Still, as someone who crosses borders and

someone who also experiences the effects of white supremacy, I was able to relate to the students in some key ways. This gave me a combination of outsider/insider status. Being an outsider in terms of gender and nationality, I was also able to not take certain things the students told me for granted, such as the way they look down on some aspects of Mexican culture.

A third aspect I must take into consideration is the fact that most Mexican American female students at UT, if my findings are correct, embody some version of the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity. Cholas and mothering teens are not the students who typically make it through the educational pipeline. They have not kept their alleged "hypersexuality" and "hyperfertility" under control, and have proven to be threats to the white and middle class norms that dominate education. Therefore, in studying the identities that Mexican women must adopt in college I am only seeing half of the picture: those who made it. To get a better picture of what social forces are affecting the identity formation of Mexican, female students, cholas and mothering teens should also form part of the study. If that was done, cholas and mothering teens need to be considered legitimate holders of knowledge in their own regard so as to avoid looking at them under a deficit lens (L. T. Smith, 1999). Moreover, an effort should also be made to encourage the exchange of knowledge between university students and the students who fall through the cracks. Only then can all the mechanisms of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy be illuminated if they are to be addressed seriously.

At the same time, I cannot help but think that scholars alone cannot design this project. As a graduate student, I have also embodied a limited identity that is more tolerant of normalizing forces. Cholas and mothering teens have some of the best critical views of the education system, pointing to other details that promote the construction of the "good student, nice Mexican woman" identity that academics can take for granted. In the spirit of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*, any study done with cholas and mothering teens must be done *in partnership with them*, starting from the design of the project all the way to the publication (L. T. Smith, 1999). Academics cannot assume a higher position to Mexican women who were betrayed by education, because

"[researchers] have the power to distort, make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but assumptions, hidden value judgments, and often downright misunderstandings" (Smith, 1999, p. 176). Along these same lines, academia will never be able to affect social structures unless it can make space for cholas and mothering teens. Current scholars can learn some of the ideologies of cholas and mothering teens if they are serious about changing the social structure at the university. This can be done as a challenge to he creation of knowledge that tends to be white-centric and androcentric.

Future line of research in this matter, then, should address the following questions: (a) what are the mechanisms of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy that push cholas and mothering teens out of the educational pipeline? (b) How does the education system need to change to be inclusive of Mexican girls who do not conform to normative expectations of femininity and sexuality, both from their home cultures and white, patriarchal culture? (c) What can Mexican, female, college students learn from cholas and mothering teens if they are to have a more complete arsenal of discourses and resources to combat normalizing forces? (d) How can transformative resistance take place in the university to help more Mexican, female students push the boundaries of their identities? (e) Given that this was the first time the students in my project talked about most of their experiences, how can graduate students at universities develop a partnership with undergraduate students as a way to exchange knowledge and experiences for the improvement of the university's racial and gender climate?

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that I do not consider The University of Texas to be a horrible place, and I do not think it is the only institution plagued by the challenges outlined here. It is a space where these students and I have been able to push the boundaries of our identities more than if we had never come. Still, I hope that if university officials read this project and if they are committed to social justice, that it provides some useful knowledge that can encourage them to enact change.

Appendix

Participant's pseudonym	Participant's Major(s)	Age	Hometown	First generation college student?	Came from a segregated high school?
Angie	Government, Mexican American Studies, Indigenous Studies	21	Houston	Yes	Yes
Blanca	Art	21	Edinburg	Yes	Yes
Fabiola	Biomedical Engineering	22	McKinney/ San Antonio	No	No
Jessica	Accounting and Management	22	El Paso	Yes	Yes
Natalia	Bilingual Education	22	San Antonio	Yes	Yes
Mary	Social Work	22	Eagle Pass	Yes	Yes

Table 1: Research Participant Profiles.

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Vita

Juan Ramon Portillo Soto was born in October 1984, in San Salvador, El Salvador, where he lived until he was 18 years old. He then pursued a bachelor's in business administration at The University of Texas at Austin, graduating on December 2006. After working in marketing for a fair trade company for three years, Juan decided to pursue a Master's in Women's and Gender Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. He is now accepted in the Sociology PhD program at UT Austin, with an expected graduation date of May 2016. Throughout his entire time in graduate school, Juan has served as one of the program coordinators for *INSPIRE: Empowering Texas Women Leaders*, a leadership and support group for undergraduate women at UT Austin sponsored by the Center for Women's and Gender Studies. He has also had the pleasure of working with two undergraduate students as their mentor for a pre-graduate school program called the *Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program*.

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